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by GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

Novels

THE THIRD HOUR
ARABESQUE

Romances

ROGUE MALE
THE HIGH PLACE
A ROUGH SHOOT
A TIME TO KILL
FELLOW PASSENGER

Short Stories

THE SALVATION OF PISCO GABAR
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THE BRIDES OF SOLOMON *and Other Stories*

For Children

THE SPANISH CAVE

Autobiography

AGAINST THE WIND

AGAINST THE WIND

GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

*AGAINST
THE
WIND*



Little, Brown and Company

An Atlantic Monthly Press Book

BOSTON • TORONTO

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FIRST AMERICAN EDITION

ATLANTIC-LITTLE, BROWN BOOKS
ARE PUBLISHED BY
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS

*Published simultaneously in Canada
by Little, Brown & Company (Canada) Limited*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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AGAINST THE WIND

Traveller

WHEN in fiction I present my hero I try to define as soon as possible his economic background. For me, at least, a man fails to achieve complete reality until I know how he has earned his living. 'What does it eat?' is the first question that the interested observer of any animal must ask.

For understanding of the human animal to ask by what work it eats is, except to the epicure, more revealing. I suspect that in future generations, if indeed they take for granted their rights to food and employment, the answer may be unimportant; but, in my own, wars and their financial consequences have too often made the filling of the belly as well as the filling of the mind an uncertain and picaresque adventure.

I belong to the transitional order between the mild and herbivorous capitalist and that anxious carnivore, the clerk with a family. My great-grandfather had the talent for earning more than he spent. My grandfather bought with his considerable inheritance the estate of Bilney in Norfolk and doubtfully enjoyed the life of a country squire until he attempted, very reasonably, to recover on the stock exchange what he had lost in the disastrous agricultural

years at the end of the eighteen-seventies. Thus the only result of this fly-by-night capital was to raise the Households from small East Anglian farmers into the professional class. My father became one of H.M. Inspectors of Schools and then Secretary of Education for Gloucestershire; my uncle, an infantry officer. For me, too, the most probable employer was the State, and I surmise that I might have done very well in the Consular Service provided I escaped severe censure in my early twenties for some spectacular orgy, harmless in itself but of quite unconsular proportions.

I was set firmly upon the conventional ladder. A preparatory school which I loved and a public school which I detested led on to Oxford; and a shallow facility for examinations enabled me to ease my father's life by scholarships. I did not ease my own. I was always expected to keep up the academic proprieties outside the examination hall—an absurd demand when all I had really learned was to present the few facts I knew with taste, and surround them with the mystery of learning.

Yet some of my examiners were great men, not easily impressed by sleek writing, and it may have been that a genuine respect for scholarship shone through my pretences. I myself was never a scholar—using the word in its untranslatable, donnish sense—but I did at least know how to be one. That alone was enough to mark me as a possible initiate of the mysteries, and to this day my mind remains questioning rather than intellectual. I have too little patience with the firmly-instructed of the modern world.

But this is a mere introduction to my story; and indeed I do not know whether the random collision which knocked my nucleus into space was due to academic distinction or to my unperturbed ability to miss driven pheasants. Thereafter, instead of bearing my strains and stresses in a solid, I flew off upon the glittering path of instability.

In 1922 a good degree did not enable a man to choose among industrial or government posts. The soldiers, three or four years older than I but completing their interrupted education at the same time, very rightly had first pick. There was also a depression. If I had had any definite ambition, I suppose I might have put myself in the way of fulfilling it; but I had none—not even an impractical and romantic idea of what I wanted to do. I was eager only to have done with education.

My development was freakishly late. To me money was something which happened or did not, and could no more be influenced than the weather. The usefulness of friends, clubs and connections simply did not occur to me, nor could I have told a prospective employer a single sane reason why he should pay me a salary. Among my close friends, however, was Ivor Barry. What we had in common was, I think, an almost oriental dislike of any intellectual, athletic, political or social activities. We basked in that Nirvana which was Magdalen and were very content. That his courteous father was Managing Director of the Ottoman Bank I knew, but it meant nothing to me. I treated a power in the post-war world with as much nonchalance as if he had been the vicar of his village of Nettlebed.

They were his pheasants which I missed. I cannot imagine what he saw in me; he must have perceived my *gaucherie* and worldly innocence; but those qualities are often accompanied by integrity. Perhaps he hoped that time would wear away the one, and be powerless against the other.

In November 1922 Barry offered me £400 a year to go out to Bucharest and learn to be a banker. I accepted with joy and excitement, knowing nothing more of banks than that they were institutions upon which one drew a cheque hoping that it would be paid. I certainly did not appreciate

that the object of a bank was to make money for its shareholders—for I can remember how that simple fact burst upon me months later with the all-clarifying light of a revelation. As nearly as I can recapture the formless image in my mind, I thought a bank was in the nature of a public utility and that my duties would approximate to—as I should now put it—those of a Third Secretary in the Commercial Attaché's office.

The Ottoman Bank was a Franco-British consortium which had the dignified flavour of the City at its Victorian greatest, and of Second Empire Paris at its most enterprising. Between the western frontiers of the Balkans and the eastern of Persia it upheld the respectability of money among the rapacious traders of the Levant—a mission as eccentric and deserving as to raise the standard of cookery among cannibals; but it paid. The Greek, the Baghdad Jew, the Armenian and the Pasha, having made their money, did not greatly desire to entrust its safe-keeping to each other.

Whenever the Ottoman Empire gave painful birth to a Balkan State or, after 1918, to Arab States, the Ottoman Bank threw off a subsidiary to act as financial nanny. These, if run from London rather than Paris, had at least one British manager. Interesting men they were, but about themselves uncommunicative. They had acquired their wisdom and their languages by hard experience. They were not always the type to decorate as well as manage the head offices in London.

Barry's policy was to collect a few future general managers from the universities and then put them through the mill abroad. It did not work for him, nor for the allied Anglo-Austrian Bank which tried the same plan at the same time. The reason was eventually obvious. The local managers had not the slightest interest in turning their banks into business academies for young gentlemen, who

soon drifted away. However golden the future, the boredom and frustration of the present were unbearable.

I crossed Europe by the Orient Express a few weeks before my twenty-second birthday. I had never before been abroad, and romanticism ran wild during those four days in the train. It had reality, for, though I did not know it, I was travelling in the fourth dimension and bound for the nineteenth century. I stepped off the express into a country where Society still lived exactly as in the pages of de Maupassant, where the peasant still dressed, thought and worked in that timeless stability which ended in England with the Industrial Revolution and was destroyed in eastern Europe far more by elementary education, the cinema and the automobile than by Communism.

The Bank of Roumania, that subsidiary of the great Ottoman to which I had been condemned, worked its clerks and managers from nine to twelve-thirty and three to six. Saturday was a half day—if that be a fair description of five hours followed by an exhausted lunch about half-past two. A long week-end was rare, for we did not close on Saturday if a national holiday fell on a Friday. The only hope was a Saint's Day on Monday.

The manager had one brilliant apprentice on his hands already; he was not going to be bothered with the training of another. He buried me in the Correspondence Department as an extra clerk, and there for four years I remained. He had the excuse that in the Correspondence you learned more of banking than in any other department, which was possibly true; on the other hand you saw nothing whatever of accounts, of discount, of arbitrage or of stocks and shares; and you never, except by accident, met a customer. I learned to type with two fingers and the various ways in which money can be transferred from hither to yon and what a documentary credit was. I cannot think of anything else. My position was made clear from the start when

I was refused a key to the managerial lavatory. For the staff of about a hundred there were two others. That they worked at all was due not to water but to our resplendently uniformed porter and his staff of office.

The English manager falls headlong into the class of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*. But in spite of detesting me he was in his own house pleasant, generous and hospitable. The Roumanian Christian manager was of immense distinction and had a long, silky, grey beard which enabled him to talk to politicians on equal terms and would have graced any chamberlain at the courts of St Petersburg or Vienna. The Roumanian Jewish manager was the most important of all, since half the customers and nine-tenths of the staff were Jews. He was a cordial old pawnbroker in manner, appearance and thought, and if the bank ever made more than its hum-drum monthly profit I suspect that he was responsible.

Among the clerks and customers there must have been characters of fascinating richness, but they passed through my life ten years too early. I had been sent out with prohibitions ringing in my ears. I was not to be too familiar with the local staff. I was not to become involved with local merchants. And I was not to marry a Roumanian. That advice was sound in so far as a young man should be discouraged from marrying anyone at all in his early twenties, but unjust. Roumanian women were of astonishing loveliness and courage, with a true appreciation of the joys of food and drink. Their attitude to marital fidelity—from their husbands they expected none—was perhaps light-hearted, for the Greek Orthodox Church, though as proud and ancient as the Catholic, had a reasonable attitude to divorce. But they did not hurry to take advantage of it. Their merry lapses were more civilised than beauty's solemn progress from marriage, by way of the psychiatrist's consulting-room, to marriage.

For all there was to see of high finance, I might as well have been employed by any provincial bank in England. The Bank of Roumania was not the national bank, and the Franco-British capital behind it had little influence on the post-war policies of the country. I should not, of course, have known in my first year or two whether it did or not, but later on I do not think I could have wholly missed any major movement, however discreet. The fact is that the bank confined itself to the most conservative operations, feeling its way through the devastating inflation which was then a new phenomenon to the practical banker in Europe.

Bolder finance, when there was any, our London office undertook; and the General Manager was sued by his own bank—long after my time—for exceeding his powers in granting political overdrafts. He suffered from too swift a rise, if I read him rightly, and too vaulting an ambition to leave his mark upon the history of eastern Europe; and I would not blame vanity any more than his devotion to a charming French wife and two pretty daughters. I liked him for his tentative flamboyance, for his determination to enjoy the luxuries of life and to learn how to enjoy them. It was a pity, and perhaps unmerited, that his name should be recorded only in the Law Reports.

That a bank clerk without any private income should be quite as accustomed to luxury as his General Manager was unnatural and due entirely to inflation. The Roumanian leu had fallen from 25 to 700 to the pound, and prices had not caught up. My four hundred a year, from which neither England nor Roumania collected any noticeable income tax, put me into the class of some gilded youth from P. G. Wodehouse. Before I left, my salary had gone up to seven hundred, and the exchange rate had gone down to 1,200 lei to the pound. I can never be so rich again. The standard of living which I then enjoyed only

exists today in France, and those who can both afford it and appreciate it are few.

Had I come under the influence of some predicted pillar of Church or State—an unlikely event, since both at school and at Oxford I was too aimless to appreciate columnar virtues in my contemporaries—I might at least have taken Roumania gradually. As it was, I surrendered to a most vivacious influence. He had arrived in the Bank of Roumania a year before me on a similar but superior ticket. His full title was Confidential Secretary to the Management. Unlike myself, he was free of the secret files and the managerial privy. He had spent the four years of the war interned in Ruhleben, and had come out with a desire for living so passionate that Cambridge, London and now Bucharest trailed behind his ability to extract amusement from them.

It was he who met me on my arrival. By the end of the day he had made sure that I knew about half the foreign colony, that I was wild with excitement for the future flesh-pots and that I was not the least danger to him. His generosity of temperament, his tall, dark distinction were more fitted to some exiled Russian prince than to a formal British banker, and could have disconcerted a board of directors less cosmopolitan than ours. He wondered if I had been sent out as a possible replacement. It must have been a comfort to him to discover that my business age was about twelve and that—since he had to put up with me in working hours—my ideas of what constituted amusement were, though still tentative, his own.

He encouraged me to be a hedonist, for whom good taste should be the only moral standard. He was four years older than I in age and twenty in experience, a brilliant linguist with a brain magnificently equipped for art or letters or finance. I owe to him the beginnings of my social

education—I was sadly lacking in any of the graces—and the immediate and lasting destruction of my public-school prejudice against speaking foreign languages well. I also owed to him a precocious worldly wisdom, for though he approved my self-indulgent explorations he was careful that I should know the motives of all concerned, from my own to those of a cabaret porter or a politician with a pretty wife.

Thus he was far from a corrupter of youth. I was too apt a pupil. And pleasure tended to be all for the body since there was none for the spirit. My work could have been done as well by any bright secondary school boy, and very seldom was there time for my favourite and most innocent recreation, which was—and is—to do nothing in particular in open country. Tennis and golf had little to offer, for I have never found any sort of fulfilment or relaxation in propelling a ball more accurately than my companion. Even the horse, which I might then have mastered, was no mount for one who dreamed that he was riding into the ground the very leopards of Dionysus.

For the equivalent of half a crown—about the price that a young bank clerk should pay for his lunch and dinner—I could do myself as well as any man in Europe. The best restaurants of Bucharest were all ambitious; two, Capşa and Cina, superbly succeeded. They had collected recipes from the three Empires, then but four years in the grave, which surrounded Roumania and had refined them by French craftsmanship. Their explorations even pierced the unprofitable mist of Atlantic islands. Among the outlandish Russian and Turkish names, which lit the French of Capşa's menu like dream cities in a sonnet of Baudelaire, appeared Irish Stew. I remember it was the best I ever ate, while forgetting how in the world the three strange syllables were pronounced.

For a pound I could have dinner for two in a private

room of gold and cream and crimson, somewhat shabby from war and German occupation, but preserving that luxurious air of late-Victorian discretion which more properly belonged to my father's generation than to mine. In one of those musical-comedy rooms I first discovered that the French with which I had been tortured at school could actually be used as a method of communication between two human beings. Thereafter I was ready to investigate the possibilities of my even more rudimentary German. Roumanian I never mastered till sixteen years later—a devastating proof of the futility of my life. I mixed only in society which spoke English or international French or somewhat yiddish German. The bank gave me no opportunity to identify myself with the country.

Among those companions whom I entertained in a style to which they were more accustomed than I there ought to have been one to speak nothing but Roumanian and to teach me at least the musical endearments. But I could not even handle my own amorality. Ever since schooldays I had always thought myself in love with some delicious child, treating her with comparative and poetical respect while pursuing at large the life of an anxious tom-cat. Not even in Bucharest was I able to combine my drawing-room and my back-street tastes.

I well remember, at the age of about seven, falling silently on my knees at a children's fancy-dress party before a dainty Titania in a pink tou-tou. There is the key to what I was: impulsive, extremely sensitive to feminine beauty and over-fastidious. And in Roumania such a temperament was nothing but an expensive nuisance. I was too conventional—a mingling of chivalry with caution—to discover whether any of the provocative young society beauties shared my enthusiasms, too aesthetically minded not to bother with elegance at all, too hare-brained to pay discreetly the rent of some unattached Roumanian who

might well have been as sensible as she was lovely. So in that half-world of cabarets and Russian refugees, where remained some slight illusion of seduction, I tended to pass from flower to flower; but at least flowers they were.

For one mercy to my youth I shall be ever grateful to Roumania. Had so eager a young fool been hurled into a life of hedonism where wine was neither the normal fashion of his friends nor within easy reach of his pocket, he might have taken to swilling dollops of gin and whisky with the abandon of a serious drinker. As it was, I adopted the habits of the country and released the civilised European who lies, half a litre below the surface, in the average introverted Englishman; if, with the second half-litre and the brandies, I released a noisier European, his behaviour was generally more a matter for laughter than shame.

I returned to England on a month's leave in December 1923. That is as good a time as any to take stock. The bankers in London said that I had become more mature. I privately ridiculed their opinion, and ascribed it to the fact that I was now dressing darkly like a respectable businessman. However, they were obviously right since I should never have dared, a year earlier, to suspect them of shallow thinking.

At any rate, I was now ready to begin the advance along the axis expected of me. Though I had still no sense of personal discipline, the wild preliminary gallop on the sensual animal had tired him into a more pleasurable trot. I was also on the edge of realising that my world was bounded by the Black Sea, not the Channel. I was still years away from the ability to talk—assuming we had a common language—as effortlessly to a foreigner as to an Englishman, but I no longer measured him or his way of living by their resemblance to the familiar. Like so much in my life, this tentative cosmopolitanism arrived by way

of my belly rather than my brain. Homesick though I was for my own country, I could not help observing that I should need a very unlikely salary in London to enable me to keep up my standard of living—a sordid foundation for fraternal sympathy, yet more firmly to be built on than the vaguer liberalisms of the professed internationalist.

I returned to Bucharest more willingly than I expected. Somewhere in January Switzerland—it might have been Buchs—the Arlberg Express stopped between two formidable walls of ice through which tunnels had been cut to give access to the station. I got out to stretch my legs and have a drink. While I was thus arctically engaged, the unseen train started. I heard it and, with the ears of the spirit, the sceptical remarks of the manager when I was not back at my post on the appointed day. I foresaw my baggage and passport lost for ever. By the time I had raced down the platform and through the nearest hole, the tail of the train was fifty yards away and gathering speed. It skidded on ice, and I was able, just, to grab the rail and step of the luggage van, where I remained shivering through tunnels until the train reached Austria and stopped. My body, though I tried it hard, was resistant, and would do anything that I could reasonably ask of it except play games.

My fellow apprentice was now married, and battling to reduce himself to a more Kensingtonian daintiness of living. His favourite fiction that nothing but the best was good enough for him looked a little more like snobbery, a little less like ambition to distil the essences of the moon. Hero worship was the thinner for that, and friendship the stronger. He was unendingly kind to me, lending me comfort or money whenever I badly needed either. In reckoning his sins no seraphic manager could ever refuse him an overdraft, for he was always ready to pay in to his account that tremendous credit, tolerance. Had I landed

myself in a really scandalous mess, which only by the grace of God I never did, it would have been he who extracted me and kept silent.

I was now coming under the influence of much older men, who were all capable of enjoying a riotous night as much as I, and did not offer it the compliments either of addiction or of remorse. French, Belgians, British and Austrians, many of them had made their career in Russian oil, so that the emotions and vitalities of the Tsarist Empire became familiar to me from the talk of my own sex as well as that of those delicious and melancholy women who migrated to Bucharest when the British Army of Occupation left Istanbul.

There was the Belgian Minister who told me, apropos of I know not what Byronic extravagance, to go away and read Anatole France—for whom my affection has never varied, though now I consider him less a teacher of how to think than of what to laugh at. He, too, it was—the Belgian Minister, I mean—who made a most profound remark which I myself have repeated to young aspiring cosmopolitans. Intending to visit Paris, which I had never seen, on one of my leaves, I asked him where to stay and where to eat. He replied that to me, in the pattern of my life, Paris was bound to become a second home, that I had no need to visit it and should go to some town which I was unlikely ever to see again.

A useful antidote was Lionel Ludlow, who had fought in the Matabele Rebellion, known Rhodes and passed from gold-mining in South Africa to Roumanian oil. Like any good Empire Builder, he placed for me the life of dinners and card-leaving in its true proportions. Above all was Fred Thompson who descended upon us from Price, Waterhouse in Paris, often with a considerable team of accountants, to audit oil companies and finally opened an office in Bucharest. He was something less than ten years

older than myself—a man with a genius for friendship, so loving all Europeans and Americans who honestly presented themselves to him that his only protection was irony. From him I would take rebuke, advice and ridicule—and still happily invite them, for he alone of them all remains an intimate friend.

What they saw in me, those kindly watchers over my youth, I can only imagine by observing those qualities which now attract me in men thirty years younger than myself. I was so eager to learn anything of life and of peoples which could be taught me, so uninhibitedly ready to enjoy myself. I must often have been affected or a bore or gauche, but I was never uninterested. Those who had daughters considered me eligible, but no doubt shook their heads over a too Latin irresponsibility. They underrated me. My irresponsibility may have had a surface familiar to Continental fathers, but it was Anglo-Saxon in its depth.

During the four years which I passed as a modest bank clerk in working hours, and in my free time as a young man of some fashion, there was little interaction between myself and my Roumanian environment. I remained a mere tourist. By that I mean a visitor who observes, but feels no close emotional intimacy with the observed.

A man may understand, intellectually, the history and culture of an alien land, its continuity with his own and its branchings-off; he may admire its arts, its architecture and its food and drink; seduced by climate or beauty of landscape he may even be prepared to spend all his idleness upon the terraces of some little town. But until he knows that he would be far from complaining if fate compelled him both to live and to earn his living there, with only casual visits to his own country and such others as he may love, then he is still a tourist. So I can draw only what there was to see, and very little of myself. Yet a mere travel

sketch is forgivable when no more tickets will ever be sold to Ruritania.

The vast majority of the male population still wore their shirts outside their trousers, and confirmed Napoleon's aphorism that those who did so were the only honest men. Peasant costume was worn as a matter of course, without need of encouragement from folk-lore societies and nationalists. Even the industrial worker wore it, with lambskin cap on head and linen shirt nearly to the knees outside the tight, coarse-woollen trousers. On Sundays and holidays the dresses of both men and women flowered with fantastic panels of embroidery. The twentieth century showed only in the shoes which appeared to be cut from old inner-tubes—or perhaps folded from rubber sheet cut to the approximate size—and were held on by criss-crossed thongs in the manner of Viking or Saxon.

The poverty of the town peasant was brutal. The villager at least could eat, his staple diet being maize porridge, and could build when he married, at the cheap cost of his own labour and that of a few gipsies, a one-storied cottage of whitewashed mud in a painted timber frame, aesthetically pleasing, weatherproof and clean—apart, that is, from the breeding fleas left behind by the gipsies. They were all hospitable, of conventional morality, drinkers in cheerful Latin measure rather than Slav fury, and with a shade of cruelty inevitably borrowed from the Russian and Turkish armies which too frequently had liberated their women, their horses and their crops.

The class which wore tailor's trousers and tucked shirts in them seemed to me to lack any social conscience; but I may well be unfair, for I was observing the country in a state of transition between the patriarchal and the industrial. In liberal legislation Roumania was far ahead of Hungary or Poland. The great estates were broken up immediately after the war, and the boyar or landowner

was only allowed to keep for himself the equivalent of a good English farm. His sons in the army or the civil service or politics were trying to support families on monthly sums which lasted me, a single man, about five not specially extravagant days. They could not afford a too punctilious honesty. Fifteen years later, when I was again in Bucharest, corruption in public life had improved to the pleasant and manageable standards of, say, a Central American Republic.

Nearly all commerce was in the hands of the Jews, and there was no other middle class to be a buffer between the half-emancipated peasant and his former landlord. At the best the boyar among peasants had the attitude of a too-dignified officer at a party for other ranks; at the worst he was threatening, loud and rude. Even I, fresh to a peasant country and conservatively supposing that the Roumanians knew how to handle their own labour best, found the unconscious antagonism displeasing. To a Spaniard, accustomed to courtesy between man and man whatever the difference of education or income, it would have seemed outrageous.

It was still the age of the horse and the railway. Foreigners and the wealthy had cars, but their use was limited. Beneath the rare patches of flat surface the roads of spring concealed mud pools which would swallow a car to the door handles. In summer the passing of a peasant cart raised a pillar of dust so impenetrable that a driver could only enter it at peril of head-on collision with the unseen. In winter the January blizzards shrieked down from Arctic Russia over the Black Sea, and the first considerable obstructions in the path of the horizontally driven snow were the city of Bucharest and the shrinking bodies of its inhabitants. When the wind dropped there were no more cars. The city was silent and pleasantly frozen—a fairy-tale frost, not at all of Russian or Canadian

implacability—and the cab-drivers belled their horses and substituted runners for wheels.

The drivers were eunuchs. They belonged to an ultra-pious sect of the Russian Old Believers which held that a man was so far condemned to the lusts of the flesh that he might have one child; thereafter duty to his immortal soul demanded that he should place himself beyond temptation. Somewhere in Moldavia these wrinkled, hairless, yellowish men had a village and cultivable lands, but the traditional employment was cab-driving. There were, of course, other drivers, peasants uprooted though not sterile, whose cabs and horses showed their lack of any pride in the trade. The semicircle of smart victorias in summer and sleighs in winter which waited for hire outside the royal palace was all owned and driven by eunuchs.

Men and women, the Roumanians were ingenious seekers after gaiety. The summer nights were no more willingly wasted in sleep by Bucharest society than by its former peasants whose music was as wild, whose dancing was better and whose fairs took the place of cabarets. The greatest fair of all, the Moș, was held in the early autumn outside Bucharest, still surviving from the days when little could be bought in the village shop. It was a market for labour, animals and manufactured goods, where the peasant could purchase whatever he needed for the profit of what he sold and exchange lice and news with his fellows from other provinces; where the Jew and the gipsy dexterously increased their handfuls of dirty paper money, and Bessarabian horse-dealers, gallant in black and scarlet, rode with their troupes scornfully through the crowd, the golden dust of their passage settling slowly until blasted up again by the heat of the still evening and the brazen mouths of the barkers and the bands.

The traveller in time had a chance to see once more the seventeenth-century Bartholomew Fair—apart from mid-

Victorian steam roundabouts and shooting galleries in which dignified figures of iron, top- or straw-hatted, performed their natural functions when squarely hit. Monsters, dwarfs, mermaids and abortions were uninhibited, and more proper to the decent obscurity of surgical and veterinary museums than to the straw or the divan of dirty rugs upon which they wriggled when poked by the proud proprietors. There was some kind of drinking booth for every twenty yards of alley. The more cleanly had the usual gipsy band of cymbalon and strings; the cheaper made do with peasants blowing on brass or on leather instruments, including serpents and sackbuts, of astonishing antiquity. Even playing in unison the performers were hopelessly out of tune with each other, but the discords, unless you drank beneath the very mouths of the battered instruments, were unnoticeable since every band was determined to drown its neighbour.

This roaring cacophony delighted me for whole evenings; yet today I doubt if I could bear it for half an hour. That is due, I think, to a profound difference of civilisation rather than to age. After the footfalls of Bucharest and the soft silence of the Wallachian plain, where the only sounds were of frogs and running water, of domestic animals and distant voices, a gorgeous human row was welcome; but when the ears protest, though unconsciously, all day and much of the night against the rolling of traffic and the last-trump blare of aircraft, there is no human desire which more noise can possibly fulfil.

The Roumanians were far too civilised—till the rise of the fascist Iron Guard—to be always waving and saluting flags. They were cosmopolitan by tradition, drawing their culture from the Eastern and their language from the Western Roman Empires, and had little in common with the Balkan States south of the Danube. The prosperous Serb or Bulgar of the nineteenth century was still fixing

his eye upon the eccentricities of the Turkish pasha while his counterpart in Roumania already had it genially turned on Paris.

So the foreign capitalist was not hated, though nearly all industry was dominated by him. We were so obviously enjoying ourselves; and the Roumanians, who always appreciated any picturesque escapade, leaped to forgive us whenever in the extravagance of wine we held ourselves above the law. There was an occasion when a banker and *The Times* correspondent, tempted at dawn by the incongruity of a park of municipal garbage trolleys outside the cathedral, set them all loose upon the promising slope which led with processional dignity down to the River Dâmbovitza. But that was as nothing compared to the doings of the Texan oil-drillers in Ploesti. Their exploits, their women and their astonishing ability to shoot out lights without scoring on the café customers have passed into Roumanian folk-lore.

I never visited the oil-fields in those still pioneering days, though I knew the heads of the bigger companies and had only to ask. It was not lack of curiosity. My free days were so few and precious that I did not wish to waste them on anything but the duck and the Danube marshes in spring and autumn, and the high Carpathians in summer and at Christmas. So the oil towns of Ploesti and Câmpina were for me only railway stations on the way to the mountains.

I had, however, one swift and improbable visit to a little field near Bacau, spending a night on the floor of the manager's house and two in the train. General Henley, one of those much older men who befriended me and for whom I had an almost filial love, had invested in a concession where the oil was so near the surface that he and his Roumanian partner considered tunnelling rather than drilling to it, and the excavation of an underground

reservoir. That this was possible could be seen from the local peasant wells. They had a diameter of a yard or so, and were lined with wickerwork. When enough oil had seeped into the bottom of the well, the proprietor lowered a man who bailed it out with a bucket.

Henley was in some danger of being evicted from the concession by his Roumanian partner. I do not remember—if indeed I ever understood—the rights and wrongs of the case; but the general was a contemporary and friend of Hilaire Belloc and of exactly that robust and genial character which Belloc admired. He decided that possession was nine-tenths of the law and that the local manager, who was playing the partner's game, must be thrown out.

He, his Roumanian lawyer and I suddenly descended upon the field and threw him out. The lawyer then assembled the workers, who had not been paid, and addressed them. Henley and I stood by, he at least looking benevolent and patrician. Meanwhile the manager had alerted the gendarmerie, and in the subsequent *procès verbal*, to which he swore, I was described as appearing with a pistol barely concealed in my pocket and the grim face of an abandoned criminal. I fear there was some truth in it. But, fortunately for my standing as a banker, country justice was in the hands of inexperienced magistrates on starvation salaries, and the *procès verbal* was torn up.

On our way to the field we had stopped for a conspiratorial interview with the money-lender at the nearest big village. It was a village of Jews. Till then I had had the common western European illusion of Jewish prosperity, except among recent immigrants in the reception areas of great cities. That all around the Russian frontiers, from Lithuania through Poland to Roumania, they lived like the peasants in equal poverty and with less security was a new conception, destined to become more and more familiar to me. It gave me a sympathy for Zionism which

was deeply emotional, whereas that of most other Englishmen who have any is intellectual or semi-religious. There on the edge of the Jewish Pale I was again in a period of transition. The pogroms which had horrified liberal Europe by rape and murder were over. The mass extermination was still to come. Of those frustrated innocents, some desperate to escape, some finding refuge in the complication and recomplication of the divine words so that they should surrender the intention of the divine will, very few remain.

In order to fetch the wages of the workers I had next morning to ride down to this Jewish village. By a horseman's standards I cannot ride at all. I merely use the animal as convenient transport, sitting securely and correctly so long as it does not discover my complete ignorance. That oil-fields horse had the Roumanian genius for finding the weak points of the foreigner, and summed me up with a swiftness which would have been indecent in a well-trained hack.

Arriving at a forest track with a slope of one in three where the spring sun had not yet melted the ice, he squatted on his quarters in the position of a circus horse receiving a lump of sugar, and transformed himself into a bobsleigh. How he cornered I do not know; but he was obviously revelling in his skill and would have been running well up on the top of the banking if there had been any. The village banker restored my equanimity by mulled wine, and I remounted with a bag of money over my shoulder feeling that on the whole I was still a romantic figure. But that animal had my measure. He visited every flimsy building on the main street, generally entering the front door backwards. Mothers and children fled screaming, for this was worse than any descent of Cossacks. They at least knew how to control their horses.

That evening, our lawyer protesting, all three of us were

seen safely on to the train by the gendarmerie, forcing an unsatisfactory policeman's end to the story. I have no idea what happened to the partner, the manager or the concession, for the law-suit which was to decide their fate had hardly begun when Henley died on the cricket field. He may have known his heart was doomed, and for that reason wanted quick results.

No word of this adventure ever reached the bank; so that both they and I were resigned, more or less contentedly, to the continuance of my career. I rented new rooms more central and more spacious. I took to regular golf on Sundays and a four of bridge once a week; and instead of wasting time and money in the search for ever more exotic avatars of the female, I was prepared to wait for them. So blasé had I become that I took over the running of the bar at the Country Club—an invention of the diplomats swiftly patronised by the court society—because it gave me an excuse to avoid dancing.

I imagine I was becoming quite a smooth and pleasant young man with all outward eccentricities firmly suppressed unless time and season for them were presented. I had consciously decided that the two most important human virtues were dignity and discretion. I blush for this; but since dignity and discretion had cost me so much trouble to attain, it is not unnatural that I attached undue importance to them.

Yet these complacent terms upon which I was beginning to live with myself could not disguise from me the fact that, though my salary had risen to seven hundred a year, I was not earning it. When on leave in London in the summer of 1925 I suggested that I had long since learned all an insanitary correspondence department had to teach me and that I did not seem to be on the way to learning anything else. I had not long been back in Bucharest before I was offered a transfer to the Anglo-

Persian Bank, a subsidiary of the Ottoman, as a travelling inspector of local branches.

I should have enjoyed this; so would any of the local managers who happened to be feathering his nest. I still wonder why the London directors should have assumed that I was born with a knowledge of book-keeping. But perhaps they did not. My duties might have been to talk politics and high finance with the manager over a long and delicious Persian lunch, while the trained accountant, appearing from a different point of the horizon upon a somewhat balder camel, checked the bank's holdings of securities.

As a creature of moneyed or diplomatic society there was, that last autumn of my old self, little wrong with me. I was set firmly on the road to becoming a pillar of Throgmorton Street with my house in Surrey and a whole portfolio of good industrials deposited with my sententious stockbroker. Nothing could have changed the routine of a limited self and a limited society but surrender to a far more generous and powerful personality than my own, and nothing, short of disaster, could have caused that surrender but the finding in one woman not of the qualities I had tried to discover in so many, but of those I never knew existed.

Casually, and satisfied by the exquisite choosing of my midday menu, I passed down the length of the bank with some trivial enquiry from the Correspondence Department to Bills and Discount. Upon the hard bench where clients who wished to cash a cheque in foreign currency were compelled to remain a good quarter of an hour was sitting a woman of, at a guess, about my own age. With foreknowledge of the future our eyes met and could not be parted. The look was gentle, and not quite that veiled

stare which arises from the mutual decision of the genes, imperious and generally inaccurate, that they are compatible. Nor was it curiosity. I can only describe it as recognition. To avoid still wider conjecture I fall back on J. W. Dunne for explanation, and assume that the violence of the future was projecting itself into the present. As for my actions in the familiar three-dimensional world, I requested that her cheque be cashed with reasonable speed, and that was all.

Next day we passed in the street, and exchanged some remarks of a curious, sudden melancholy, unnatural for complete strangers. As in a first act of Ibsen, nothing that was said had any obvious relation to what was meant—at least not to us two who may be taken as only reading the play. To the unseen watchers in the stalls, ironic cherubim of Ashtoreth, experimenting with the human capacity for pain, the action no doubt appeared perfectly straightforward.

If the love story were fiction I should write only the woman's view of it, inevitably wiser and more sensitive than that of a young banker who would have given, if ordered, all the world but had still to learn what giving meant. Here, remembering reality, I am compelled to see the narrative through my own eyes. Rather than divide so unfairly a common possession, I shall record only those emotions—I cannot call them facts—which were relevant to my movements.

When she returned from Bucharest to Paris, the flame roared up in daily correspondence. I took my 1926 leave in February and we spent it in Nice and England, desperately searching for enough common ground to justify marriage. She could not find it. I was prepared to find it ten times over even if it was not there. Our backgrounds were as different as those of Cortés and Marina—by which I mean that however far in known history the lines of male

and female descent be traced, there would be no common ancestor and no common culture. This sudden doubling of the world was fascinating for each of us; but more intimate 'recollections' were needed—using the word both in its normal sense and that which Jacquetta Hawkes has given it. The yawn of Cortés when Marina babbled of girls, unknown to him, at Montezuma's court, the indignation of Marina when he traditionally insisted that you could not put a proper cutting edge upon obsidian though he knew from the wounds on his own body that you could—I can well imagine both and the desperate search for a community of interest to justify not only mutual love but mutual respect.

The stage was heavy with tragedy and longing and the impossible. But I was not taking impossibility for an answer. All the vitality of my youthful excesses was now channelled into a single ambition: to distort the world and the woman into the shape I wanted.

Life with an irresponsible stranger was difficult enough for her to envisage, especially since he was too young for her both in years and in experience; life with him in anti-semitic Roumania was harder still, for she came of a long, pure and mystically distinguished line of Chassidic rabbis. She was American by birth, but her childhood background, though moved across the Atlantic in space, was in time exactly that of the Moldavian village which my horse, alone of all living things in it, had been unwilling to leave.

So Roumania had to go; nor was Persia a tempting spot for the foreign wife of a continually travelling inspector. I was faced with the desperate business of finding myself another job while fifteen hundred miles from London where the jobs were handed out, and with my yearly leave already taken.

My mother, who would readily ask any stranger she

met for anything she wanted—a quality which frequently caused acute embarrassment to her husband and sons, but on occasion was useful—managed to get for me a firm offer from Elders & Fyffes, the banana importers. It gave me what I wanted: employment abroad with reasonable prospects, though my salary returned to its 1922 figure of four hundred a year.

Elders & Fyffes were model employers, ahead of their time in pensions and welfare schemes, and deservedly loved by all their British and some of their foreign employees—some only, because they believed in the curious superstition, common to nearly all British and American firms, that it was wiser to send abroad one of their own nationals of average ability or less, rather than to spend the same amount in obtaining an exceptionally able foreigner.

In the early nineteen-hundreds the firm pioneered the introduction of the West Indian banana into the British Isles and, through Rotterdam, the Continent. Their fleet suffered such losses in the war that they were compelled to merge with the United Fruit Company. It was, I believe, a very friendly Anglo-American partnership. United Fruit produced the bananas in the West Indies and Central America. Elders & Fyffes collected and sold them to Western Europe.

They were then monopolists, and could be ruthless to buyers. They had to be, for they were competing with the Canary Islands banana, which is good eating even if not fully ripe, whereas the West Indian banana, until it is deep yellow and spotted with black, is a dull vegetable rather than a fruit. So the firm had to compel wholesalers to ripen their bananas scientifically, and to market them only when ripe they were. It was a monopoly which had its advantages for the public. Today the warehousemen and retailers, secure in their knowledge that Canary bananas are hard to find and that the housewife looks for appearance rather

than taste in what she buys, defraud banana-eaters with insipid turnips of daffodil-green.

In July 1926 I reported for duty to Elders & Fyffes' immense warehouse at St Ouen outside Paris. It had the size and something of the appearance of a main line terminus in a large provincial town. The banana trains from Rotterdam were shunted in under the glass roof, and unloaded into the ripening rooms which lined, on two levels, the long sides of the building. Dealers of other nations could be bullied or persuaded into holding the fruit until it was ripe; but nothing on earth could make a Frenchman do so. With few exceptions, therefore, every West Indian banana sold in Paris had been ripened at St Ouen.

Between the tracks and in the centre of the concrete floor was a control box where one Englishman, recruited expensively in Lancashire, and another, bought cheap in Paris, checked every bunch in and every box out, bilingually and blasphemously, for ten hours from eight to six. After listening to them at work I realised that while my French might do very well for polite conversation in international society I had not even begun to speak it.

The slightly precious young banker was out of place and felt it, desperately certain that he was never going to care whether the French ate bananas or whether they performed with them the difficult operation which was being constantly recommended by the control box. It was also evident that the fruit trade called for approaching complete strangers with brazen confidence and getting up very early in the morning. The first gift I have since managed to acquire; the second, never. I spent four years trying to persuade the Correspondence Department that when I arrived at 9.20 it was the moral equivalent of 9. At St Ouen it was 8—and, if customers on Les Halles had to be

visited, it was so early that one might as well sit up all night.

After a few weeks in Paris I was sent to Lille as an extra hand while the manager was on holiday. In this small office, handling mere trucks where St Ouen handled whole trains, I began to understand the paper work of the trade and—when the market collapsed under us in a blazing August—its morale. Loyalty was not to Elders & Fyffes but to the fruit. London and Paris, Liverpool, Rotterdam, Hamburg and every little branch with an active fruit market and a goods yard baking in the heat were all trying to relieve the pressure on each other.

Hours ceased to count. Dealers were taunted into taking a wicked loss for the sake of future profits. The barrow boys charged into the battle, filling the streets with the perfume of bananas and driving the sellers of early pears and melons and peaches and grapes into appeals to their bank managers and suicidal telegrams to the growers. To be compelled to send for the municipal garbage lorries to remove a whole ripening-room of bananas was a disgrace like losing the guns. It was in fact a game, and appealed to the simple minds of the British, including my own, who prefer to exert themselves not for money or any personal reward, but simply because it has been agreed to set up a bottle in a quite arbitrary position and throw stones at it until it smashes. It may be that absurd simplicity which has made of us a people so dangerous in war. Our view of the Government and its aims is generally derisory; our pay, inadequate though it be, is disputed by the War office; our only enthusiasm is for the minor criminalities which loyalty to the unit invites and pride in ingenuity permits; but we cannot stop shooting at the bottle.

The interest in reading thermometers and gambling with my employers' assets which I began to show at Lille came too late. I was, I suspect, considered unworthy to

serve the gods of the West Indies, and relegated to the society of those degenerate Latins who had the effrontery to produce, to sell and even to eat Canary bananas. I was asked if I would like to go to Spain. I said that I would. I cannot remember an occasion in my life when, if asked to go somewhere, I did not accept.

Once in the Canary department, I was freer to enjoy Paris. So long as I turned up at St Ouen for the communal lunch—followed, to aid digestion, by violent cricket in the great concrete spaces of the warehouse—nobody much cared what I did for the rest of the day. I was supposed to be learning the business at Les Halles in the small hours of the morning. As the friendly little Spaniard who was our chief Canary salesman did not in the least want to be bothered by a sleepy and incompetent amateur, both he and I kept discreetly silent as to the time when I had really joined him on his rounds.

Again I was fated to be a wealthy bachelor. That summer in Paris the franc fell to 240 to the pound and settled around 220, but prices remained at the equivalent of 100. The rate of the franc, combined with my exasperated private misery, permitted excesses which equalled those of 1923 Roumania; but they were not enjoyable, for they were always succeeded by remorse. What should have been a gay and glittering period of my life, I remember as long weeks of futility. They ended abruptly when Marina returned to Europe. She felt the atmosphere, accompanied me to Madrid, moved by charity rather than any faith in the future, and departed again. I was becoming used to leaving railway stations with set face and alone.

The remedy was work. I did my still ignorant best to assist my companions to open the office in Madrid. They were brilliantly chosen. The General Manager in Rotterdam must have been a cunning picker of men. Moore was plain English with no frills, quietly determined to make a

success of his first independent command and with enough temperament, when annoyed or enthusiastic, to delight the Spaniards. Blairsy, the accountant, was a Canary Islander of French parentage. He took a lot of knowing, for he had slid unnoticed through the jungle of Spanish, French and English business methods until he came out on the far side with thought and speech of his own. He was a loving, gentle man, from whom eccentricities would burst surprisingly as the triumphant appearance of a tramcar just when dawn streets are at their most silent.

I was continually reminded of Borrow's *Bible in Spain*—though the three of us were but a pale shadow of one Borrow—for on the face of it there was an almost religious unworldliness in sending a British expedition to Spain to make the Spaniards eat their own bananas. But Elders & Fyffes were playing a most intelligent game. Bananas in Spain were the food of the well-to-do. If they could be made the food of the poor, then Spain would consume a high proportion of its own Canary bananas which would thus be taken off the European markets. Elders & Fyffes themselves were the biggest producers in the Canary Islands and intended to remain so, but their harvest was always getting in the way of more profitable business.

At first our mission seemed to us quixotic. The wholesalers in the Plaza de la Cebada had a proper sense of the value of leisure; they did as little work as possible for as big a price as they could get. The gospel which we had come to preach—that they should double their sales and halve their profits—was not, therefore, easily acceptable. Worse still, they were accustomed to sell bananas on commission, while we insisted that they should pay cash.

Neither Moore nor I spoke any Spanish beyond the few phrases we had picked up at hasty Berlitz lessons. But we wrestled with the language as best we could—since Blairsy, who was deep in leases and licences, could not always be

interpreting for us—and persuaded the wholesalers to buy a little on our terms. It was not really our babbling which won the trick, but the merchants' fear lest the incalculable Fyffes—that was the name of the firm in Spain, and my affectionate memory still pronounces it Feeffess—should do something English and awkward in the Islands. There was also a threat in the shape of a large empty warehouse behind the office where we could, if forced, store and ripen bananas for sale direct to the retailers. We were always trying to explain away politely the presence of this empty warehouse. We must have been altogether too courteous about it, for the wholesalers soon decided that their fears were groundless, and refused to have any truck at all with our absurd idea of selling fruit for cash.

The new and untried team was given permission to meet ultimatum by war. That was typical of our employers. They always stuck to the rule that the man on the spot knew best, and he was never reproached for making a mistake so long as it was bold and honest. In return they received an eager devotion quite unknown to businesses modelled upon the cautious and distrustful methods of Government bodies.

Moore let the usual shipment come through, though we had not a buyer in prospect. Perishable fruit, remember! We hung our bunches in the warehouse and even in the offices, and sold at cut prices to the retailers, who gladly absorbed our propaganda that the merchants were making too much profit. Another outlet was Pablo Dominguez. He was an illiterate and genial barrow boy who had won a big prize in the Spanish lottery and set himself up as a wholesale fruit merchant. We flooded him with bananas at any price he chose to pay for them, and preserved the illusion of selling for cash by collecting in nightly instalments before he could hit the cabarets with the kitty. After a few weeks of this the grave wholesalers surrendered. As for

Fyffes, Madrid, it could not only speak a sort of Castilian, but was prepared to shout it in the streets. We were accepted for the unscrupulous and laughing bandits that we were, and the warehouse was never used again.

So much for my life on the Plaza de la Cebada. In my leisure hours, when I had any, I persuaded myself that I was more miserable than I really was. Nothing suited me. Madrid compared to Paris was appallingly expensive—for the balance of payments changes the face of Europe from one generation to another. I did not like Spanish food, and I had not realised that Spanish wine should be drunk from the wood or the leather, not from the bottle. Other amusements were too formal. The Spanish vision of reality left no room for any pleasantly pagan fairyland between the altar and the cattle-market. I was thus compelled to be faithful to Marina and sourly to content myself with contemplation of my own virtue.

It also began to occur to me that I was using none of the qualities with which an expensive education had presented me, and none of its opportunities. That I was earning my living without them was a matter for satisfaction genuine enough to hide from me the fact that I had pushed away the conventional ladder of a career, but at bottom sardonic.

In such a mood of discontent—the physical causes well known to me, the spiritual less obvious—I visited Toledo; and never, perhaps, was odder reason for a pilgrimage to that harsh and beautiful power-house of history than to study its potentialities as a banana market. A couple of hours among the retailers convinced me that it was best served from Madrid, and I actually found time to enter the cathedral. I had a sense of guilt that I should give time to art, for there was a strain of masochism in me which suited the town. Because I so disliked to impose my poor Spanish and my amateur salesmanship upon men pretending to be busy, I never felt I had done enough of it. Later on, when

I was more certain of my judgement and more used to the hair shirt of the salesman, I should have admitted that in Toledo a half-hour's wearing of it was ample.

I had lunch at a humble *fonda*, sharing a table with some citizen of Christian birth and exquisite breeding who did not find it necessary to wear a collar and tie. He was probably a small farmer. Starting from the admirable relationship between our two selves, which had quietly developed over a second litre, we discussed—so far as my Spanish and his education allowed—the long lovers' quarrel between our countries. I was surprised to hear myself declaring, though he had courteously refrained from forcing any such conclusion on me, that the Reformation was a disaster and Francis Drake a pirate. He left the *fonda* before me, and when I called for my bill I found it had been paid.

That, of course, was a point of honour among old-fashioned Spaniards. We were only allowed to stand a round of drinks in a market café when the little banana war was over and Fyffes had been accepted as a permanent lodger. But I had not realised that courtesy would be so commanding as to pay in secret for the stranger's lunch and the wine which he himself had, with permission, ordered. Nor was my friend a man who could readily afford to offer himself such luxuries of behaviour.

I walked out of the city and stood by the roadside, looking across the gorge of the Tagus to the barren hills beyond. There, with an almost Pauline suddenness of emotion, I felt a sense of unity with this country, hitherto disliked. I knew beyond any doubt at all that in Spain I should find or fulfil a destiny.

It was akin to the upsurge of love which any Englishman must experience when on some perfect June day he stands upon the smooth Wiltshire or Dorset turf and looks down, northwards, over the elms and hedges of the vale. He is not

moved only by beauty of landscape, and nor was I. The bare autumn of Old Castile, the yellow stone, the distant and unpitied sky—not for these alone were skin and hair moving and sensitive, but for what they had bred. That unknown farmer, casually exposing a small splendour of humanity as if a church servant should open the doors of a golden ikon, was for ever beyond my imitation yet appealed to an ideal of generosity which I did not know I held at all.

My impressions of men and manners—vague preferences and prejudices which I had hardly attempted to analyse—took on a meaning. Then and there I realised that what I had learned from Roumania was the least of what was in it to learn, and that France when a Spaniard sees her, a little fat and sullen, from the Pass of Roncesvalles seems less essential to the well-being of mankind than when she glitters across the Channel.

Dignity, so far as it was not the unselfconscious Spanish dignity of bearing, rolled down the hill into the Tagus. Discretion appeared as an art of giving, not as an excuse for withholding oneself. A cold analysis. What happened was that Spain, so gloriously full of the trumpets and banners of the spirit, marched past; and I fell in with the baggage and the carts of pikes.

A fine conversion, it may be answered! The man had been soaking up free red wine and now maintains that he was intoxicated by a sort of mysticism. To that I reply that the conversion was permanent: that the values which I then for the first time accepted, I still accept. As for wine, my normal receptiveness is that of a cold Englishman, and it is hard to convince me of anything at all without some moderate aid from that divine drug which no scientist's prescription will ever be able to surpass. The laboratory indeed may learn to restore a tired mind or body as efficiently as the stronger alcohols; but wine heightens human

sympathy and human perception. It carries me, even if in times past with too much noise and extravagance of spirit, towards the possible man at whom I was intended to aim.

Have I in fact found a destiny in Spain? Not at any rate in the number of my visits, for it is twenty years since I was there. War sent me farther afield, and peace is such peace that I hesitate to break the pattern of the years by travel. But the influence of Spain and Spanish America is, I suspect, marked in my personality as a writer. In the real person there is only a veneer of Latinity, occasionally merging with solid wood. To Toledo, and not to any youthful training in leadership, do I owe such liking as my fellows and subordinates had for me in war. From Toledo I date the courtliness with which—I hope—I treat the stranger, though my manners to my friends leave much to be desired. Because I could think as a Spaniard I was able, when I knew neither their customs nor their language, to be easily correct among Arabs. And to this day—a trivial point but dating precisely from Toledo—if I cannot afford the best which Europe offers I prefer Spanish food.

But one ribald instance of fact is worth all this groping for the intangible. When I had been a year or more in the United States I took a boat through the Panama Canal from New York to Los Angeles. It stopped for eight blessed hours at Havana, and I fled into the peace of the old town, hungry for all the familiar simplicities. They were the days of prohibition, and, though the ship once outside territorial waters opened a bar, American thirst was too impatient to be bothered with wine.

When, therefore, I came on a cellar full of imported Rioja in the wood, I went in and ordered a ten-litre carboy, or *garrafón*, to take on board with me. The social atmosphere was restful, so I remained sitting among the barrels with other customers until I suddenly realised that

the ship was due to sail. To my horror, I found that after paying for the wine and its container I had not a cent left in my pocket for a taxi.

One of my companions upon the bench insisted that there was no need for such raw alarm, and that we had time to appreciate still another glass of Rioja. He was, he said, a taxi-driver, and it would be a pleasure for him, if I permitted it, to take me to my ship.

We reached the quay with five minutes to spare, and I said good-bye to my saviour at the length and with the warmth that his civilisation merited. Going on board with my *garrafón*, I was aware that hundreds of American eyes were watching me from the promenade deck with curiosity. Because I was late? Because I was carrying a container normally used for sulphuric acid? It took me some minutes to realise that in fact it was because the *caballero* with whom I happened to be on such excellent terms was coal-black. I had not even noticed it—or only as you notice whether a man has brown eyes or grey—since I had been thinking in Spanish and it was therefore impossible that my manners should be affected by colour. Most of those Americans would have been, no doubt, just as courteous as I, but they would have been conscious of virtue. I was not. Yet if I were in Durban, not Havana, I doubt if I could always treat the African as I should wish to—though it would be my English sense of class rather than colour which prevented me—unless I deliberately imagined that he spoke Spanish.

A footnote to my story. The barman threw my *garrafón* overboard when I was not looking, and with studied insolence hardly troubled to pretend that he had not. It would have been excusable if there had been anything to drink with the unspeakable meals upon that floating hell of sweetness and light; but since there was not, the murder of my *garrafón*, drowned as if it had been some monstrous

kitten, showed a lack of business sense which one does not expect in barmen. Wine with my meals instead of the iced water with which my fellow passengers were encouraging their future ulcers would have increased my tolerance, and I should have bought more, not less, of the poisons poured from his shining and hygienic dispensary.

But why exasperate memory? Let us return to Spain. With Madrid reluctantly buying bananas, Moore sent out his missionaries farther afield. Blairsy took over roaring Barcelona. I carried the propaganda to the North Coast, and in the spring of 1927 opened an office in Bilbao. I was astonished to discover that I was an efficient business man, confident in my ability to judge the market, to remember the nicknames of the stevedores, to handle the Customs, the mates of Spanish ships (who could bring disaster on all of us if they did not watch the temperatures in the holds) and the stationmasters from whom I had to extract closed wagons. Against this, I readily admit that I could never have held a job as shipping clerk or accountant. If I had to count crates unloaded from ship to wharf, I got the total wrong; and it took me months to master Fyffes' basically simple method of accounting for fruit and cash by one immense sheet on which little totals travelled from box to box and line to line until, sweating with panic, they emerged from the maze into reality by a turnstile in the bottom right-hand corner.

This was in a way success, and it is possible that I looked forward in rare moments of ambition to becoming a director of Elders & Fyffes. Certainly I would far rather have been that than a director of the Ottoman Bank at four times the income. But I suspect that I handled my branch, profitable though I made it, in too personal a manner—a fault in war and in commerce, for it sets unnecessary difficulties for a successor. I liked to have big customers and few of them. I hated to start competition

to men who had taken a chance with me in the first few months—more especially as I was very fond of them.

First and toughest was Bernardino Garay, a sturdy, pock-marked man in his middle forties, with the face of a Roman Emperor on a day when the legions were doing well and his chief rival had died in battle. He had the short, thick hawk-nose common among the Basques, which I was to see again in Lebanon.

When I first called on him he was a plain corner grocer with a couple of bunches of bananas hanging in his doorway. He listened to my story, checked the figures and plunged. With the profits of the first half-year he rented the whole basement under a block of flats, fitted it up for scientific ripening and handed over the grocery shop to his wife.

Like all Basque business men, he had a contemptuous confidence in his own ability to make twice as much money as other Spaniards in half the time, and it infuriated him that his and my chief competitor, a charming and worried Canary Islander who imported from his brothers' estates, could occasionally lay a successful ambush. The feeling between the relentless Basque and the dashing Andalusian grew so bitter that I had to reduce temperatures by getting them together over a dinner table. The party became uproarious and exclamatory as soon as they discovered that the bad risks in the market were telling the same lies to both of them.

There was a small British colony in Bilbao, all engaged in shipping and the iron-ore trade, but I saw little of them—with the exception of a salesman of my own age, named Foster, who loved Spain for the same intangible reasons and spoke a Spanish as fluent as my own and less coarsely proletarian. We met for the first time on the top of a mountain and, though each morally certain that the other was English, opened conversation in formal Castilian.

After that we were frequent companions on the wild beaches, in the dusty lanes and at the wine-stained tables in remote country taverns.

Otherwise I lived as a middle-class Spaniard and mixed only with them. That this was pleasant and possible was due entirely to Bernardino Garay. He introduced me to the customs and foods and wines of the Basque provinces, explained to me the customs of other provinces, corrected me if my manners were insufficiently punctilious and educated me in the fine points of bull-fighting. Not that Bilbao cared for too refined an artistry. We preferred the big Miura bulls and swordsmen such as Martin Aguero who killed with a single thrust. The butterflying of gipsies, however exquisite, left us cold if they finished by poking at the bull from—should there be such a thing—a safe distance.

I had small customers all the way from Pamplona to Oviedo, and big ones at San Sebastian and Santander. I loved the narrow-gauge railways which carried me from port to port and, above all, the toy train which rumbled, stopping for lunch a full comfortable hour, from Santander into Asturias along the loveliest coast in Europe—still mercifully without hotels though I could wish that one would be opened for me alone.

In San Sebastian my buyer, Macario Sanz, was a merry man of Aragon, blasphemous, excitable and a gifted player of the guitar. Compared to Garay, he seemed more like an Italian than a Spaniard. That dancing, thoroughbred nervousness had given him a stomach ulcer. You would never have known it except when he cursed blind because he had to drink milk. A triumph of temperament over pain.

In Santander I had two customers, with stands opposite each other separated only by the central aisle of the market. The wives, who were ladies of very decided character,

were not on speaking terms and their husbands obeyed. One was a mass of bosom and dignity, a pillar of Church and State dressed always in black, with a little daughter neatly curled and frilled. The other, a republican and an atheist, was dressed in whatever she happened to find under the bed when she got up, with several little daughters in rags. The working capital of both families was about equal.

Anywhere else the quarrel could be analysed as a question of class, between a woman trying to rise and another who could not be bothered, or—looking for a political rather than a social cause—as a quarrel between authoritarianism and democracy. But in Spain both simplifications are too easy. Even among women any head-tossing or verbal expression of class difference is rare. As for democracy, the Spaniard is too solid a realist to consider the vote a practical method of government. It is a pantomime of approval or disapproval.

The antagonism between my two customers began in the middle of the last century, caused the revolution, burst out into the Civil War and is nowhere near a solution yet. On the right of the market was monarchy and paternalism for the worker; on the left, republicanism and legislation for the worker. But the political division does not correspond to our own, where the left stands for state control and the right for such individual liberty as is still possible. The Spanish left had a strong tendency to anarchism and put individual liberty above all else. That was the ideal which wrecked the Republic. It refused to govern. The Spanish right was for authority first, and liberty afterwards.

But between the two positions there was plenty of room for compromise. Dignity disapproved, like any respectable woman, of Alfonso XIII and had an exaggerated opinion of the dictator, Primo de Rivera. Rags would have hanged Primo de Rivera on the market gates but saw qualities in

Alfonso XIII which might have made him a picturesque leader of the masses. The fundamental division was over the Church, and it was their respective attitudes towards the Church which forced the two parties, in Santander market as in Spain, into positions from which there was no retreat.

Only the foreigner profits, and I was no exception. I had only to tell one that the other did not complain of my price and was giving me a big order for her to do so as well. I am thankful to record—since it is a good omen for Spain—that eventually their common sense triumphed. They compared notes; and on my next appearance in the market each listened to the other telling me what she thought of me. But Church was so pleased by the cutting courtesy of her beautiful Spanish, and the Embattled Working-Class by its flow of Rabelaisian invective that I was quickly forgiven.

After a year of casual business drinks with both husbands, Church asked me to lunch at her flat. This was utter tragedy for Labour, for she could not bring herself to do the same, knowing how primitive her family living quarters were. It was a proud day in my life when at last she took the plunge, since it showed a confidence that I would not compare, not despise and not talk. I must admit that when I reached her depressing room I thought politeness was going to have to work overtime. But it was not necessary. Aided by some obscure and heavenly dish from her own village of Torrelavega, warmth took its place.

Thereafter lunch in Santander presented a complication of protocol which would have puzzled a court chamberlain. I had to choose between inviting or being invited by one of the families. That offered four possible alternatives, one of which would be correct and three of which would be wrong. They were again not on speaking terms, but their stalls were so close that each could hear the other's invi-

tation; and I am certain those confounded women used to take a quiet pleasure in waiting for whatever social lies I should have to invent.

While all this entertaining and, for me, revolutionary life was going on, only a third of me appreciated it once the door of my room was shut. The other two-thirds were in love and steadfastly refusing to take no for an answer.

I caressed Marina with innumerable letters, trying to make of words an astral body, an extension of myself more powerful and more present than any her memory could supply. My own memory was obedient. I would not allow it to play me that trick, intolerable to lovers, of obliterating within a week the face of the beloved. Feature by feature I built it in air, for when I was with her I marked down the curve, the angles and the shadows like a draughtsman preparing a portrait upon the sale of which he must live a year.

How often I wrote I cannot remember, but it was never less than once a week. Sometimes I had as many answers, and my private life would be almost gay with hope. Sometimes there would be a gap of a month or more, and I learned to dread the letter which would end the silence more than the silence itself.

At last she mentioned a possible return to Europe, and I convinced myself she would stay. She had never made any conditions for marriage. She was far too generous a person. But certain minimum conditions were obvious. Financial security. A reasonable climate since her health was erratic. A standard of living sufficient to give her ease. Bilbao provided the lot. That accounted for my relentless energy in carving out a kingdom for myself.

I felt that an atmosphere of domesticity might be impressive, emphasising the new solids in my character and my work. So I took a flat in the coastal village of Algorta, half an hour from Bilbao by electric train, and proceeded

sketchily to furnish it like a cock bird building his token nest in the mating season and ceremoniously presenting a twig to the suspicious hen.

It was my first attempt at creating my own living conditions, and memory dwells upon the result with mingled amusement and hatred. The purchase of furniture, linen and crockery left me with nothing for redecoration, with the result that I had to do my best with colours as I found them. The living-room was a lovely place, for one window looked across the sea to the faint red and white of Castro Urdiales, sixteen miles away, and the other to the green peak of Gorbea and the foothills of the Pyrenees. Give me that room today, a bucket of whitewash and a Bokhara rug, and I do not think I could go far wrong. As it was, I found a wallpaper of violet and brown surmounting a dado of imitation dark-oak panelling. Faced with the impossible, I settled for violet curtains as well. I am certain that the bouts of depression which later overcame me in that room were due quite as much to the colour scheme as to hopeless love.

The bedroom lent itself to more daring treatment. I decided that I could not offend the canons (whatever they might be) of interior decorating if I followed the colours with which nature had adorned the pomegranate, and I maintain to this day—though Marina would not, I think, agree with me—that if I had not set my pomegranate among such an unconscionable deal of bright green, it would have been a room of distinction.

In the dining-room taste was surer. A local cabinet-maker built and carved from his book of patterns a Chippendale table and chairs of solid Spanish walnut. His craftsmanship illumined the whole room. So did that of my cook. I can claim no credit for finding her. An agency sent her, hoping that a foreign bachelor would overlook the fact that she had no references. She was a respectable

lady of middle age and middle class who had just run away from an unspeakable husband. But I did not then know it, and I am bitterly ashamed to remember that I took no interest whatever in her personal life or that of the little daughter who accompanied her. Our only common ground was my evening meal, which gradually became as much French as Spanish, for I had only to explain to that admirable woman how a dish appeared and of what it chiefly tasted for her to produce the original.

Marina, arriving duly chaperoned, was impressed. But no sooner was she assured by the obvious respectability of my life that I had learned discipline than the very dullness of that life appalled her. I was had both ways. She found less attractive than ever the prospect of marriage to a fruit merchant whose social and intellectual interests appeared to be dead, whose fixation upon the colour of ripe bananas was such that he desired the complementary violet to decorate the living-room.

The verdict was unfavourable, but a remission of my endless sentence, of which I had now served three years, seemed just possible. Nineteen twenty-eight was in its way an endurable year, for Paris, where she decided to live, could be reached for a week-end if one spent two nights in the train, and the second-class return fare was no great extravagance.

I remember setting out for a long Christmas week-end, to which I had looked forward for months. I arrived at Irun, the frontier station, and found that I had forgotten my passport in the office safe. It took me a mere quarter of an hour to satisfy the Spanish frontier officials—since the Irun Football Club had been enjoying a season of remarkable success, and I could recall the scores and the opponents.

Very well, they said, an Englishman of such sympathy and distinction could go, so far as they were concerned, to

France or the devil without a passport, but the French would never let me in. The French frontier control officer, advised by his Spanish colleague that I was a known ornament of the Basque Provinces and that I only wanted to go to Paris for Christmas to see my girl, agreed at once that the object was worthy and go I might, but added that the stationmaster would never give permission.

I could not see what the stationmaster had to do with it, but I was encouraged to try my hand with him. He was indeed the most difficult of them all. Railway Law laid it down that if there were an accident and if my body were collected with no papers of identification, then the stationmaster would be responsible. I cannot explain this, but as in so many arbitrary rules of French bureaucracy there is, somewhere, logic. I assured him that the Paris-Orléans had never been known to have an accident—the line had just had two spectacular smashes—and it so pleased him that the vulgar publicity had not reached me that he, too, let me through.

That was a civilised Europe. On my way back to Bilbao, the Spanish officials were so delighted by my success, to which they themselves had chiefly contributed, that we had a bottle of wine in the customs shed—their wine. At no point had there been any question of a bribe.

During that year of 1928 Marina and I became friends in love rather than strangers in love. She still believed that I ignored far too many human beings. I on my part had little patience with her marked sympathy for the worthless. Her values were exaggeratedly early Christian, and both emotion and the expression of it were important to her; a mandarin or stoic self-control she underrated. But we were each beginning to understand the reactions of the other to the outside world, and the store of common memories grew. There were more things to laugh at. My disappointment when I found that I could not hold her was worse

than ever, for this time there was no very obvious reason.

She must have known that her loveliest quality was wasted on me, for I have never been a man who could be mothered. My instinct in trouble is not to lay my head upon a woman's bosom but to get into a corner by myself. What then, in the absence of children, was to be her woman's reward? In spite of all that casual travel, those crossings and recrossings of the Atlantic, venturousness had no appeal for her. For few Americans is it enough. Their men—if it is fair to judge by the mass of the soldiery in war—are capable of such monumental boredom in any foreign land that to engage the enemy is less hardship than to endure the ally; their women are unhappy unless they can create or persuade themselves that they have created the atmosphere of their own home town. Yet Marina would have accepted Bilbao and courageously faced her own homesickness if she had felt that I really needed her. I suppose few women have ever been needed more, and for the sake of her character and companionship as much as for her physical beauty. But I should agree that there was something wrong with the need. It lacked humanity. It had some resemblance to craving for a drug, though the drug was an ideal.

So long as she remained in Paris, I could disguise from myself the fact that the usual end was on the way to me. When she left for America, I had nothing. The trade which I had learned, the Bilbao office, the flat were all in ruins. I was twenty-eight. Where the devil did one start again and how?

I am now entitled to have the young man up for judgement, since I am just double his age. But what sermon to preach at him I do not know. Such obstinate purpose, such concentration on a single objective is generally thought laudable when the ambition is political or financial, and foolish when it is a woman. I doubt if there is much to

choose between them. In both cases you force yourself to travel through the summer fields of life in a train with the blinds down. Failure to attain your love will give you far more misery than to be suspended from dealings on the stock exchange or passed over for a parliamentary under-secretaryship. On the other hand the lover may spread his interests as the careerist dare not; his window blinds are continually jumping up.

They began to jump at random, though the train still raced along its single track to the horizon. Marina's circle in Paris intersected with that of literary and artistic frauds who concealed their inability to think by taking in vain the names of Joyce, Stein, D. H. Lawrence and such obscure psychologists as had built improbable worlds of their own upon the enthusiastic misunderstanding of Freud and Jung. My visits were seldom long enough for me to be personally involved. I got the various gospels second-hand. But to this day I dislike to be called creative. Those international plagiarists bandied the word creation about, while approaching it no nearer than rest on the seventh day.

Some small part of this invective may have escaped me at the time, for Marina's attitude was that if I found them shallow I could go and do better myself. A literary life had never even occurred to me as a possibility. When I went down from Oxford I had not for a moment considered journalism or letters as a profession, and I had never tried to write for publication.

It seems to me odd that I should have unhesitatingly assumed that Marina knew what she was talking about. But I acknowledged her to be well read—which I was not—in everything of importance published since about 1912; and, after all, she had some evidence on which to judge. She had been reading Geoffrey Household every week for three and a half years.

So when my plans for Bilbao and matrimony went up in smoke—a more intangible smoke than usual—I kept myself from a depression which might have verged on the dangerous by deciding to become a writer. I had no sense of conviction, not even any particular wish for the trade; but I saw that it stopped her last escape route. If I could travel and live wherever she liked, that was the end of excuses.

Back in that damned violet room I set to work. I had no doubt that my stuff was good—it had every amateur fault, but the illusion was protective—and yet grave doubts whether it would sell. I was right to be cautious. Nothing that I did then and for years to come had any effect on my final choice of profession. This beginning was a mere unfortunate flash in the pan. For that reason I dismiss it here. It does not belong to my third life as a conscientious craftsman.

I had no intention of cutting loose from commerce until I knew I could eat, but fate and my own impatience played me an uncommonly shabby trick. In the late spring of 1929 I sent to Marina a bundle of short stories. Through a journalist who was one of her lame ducks she submitted them for an opinion to Brandt & Brandt, the New York literary agents—then quite unknown to me and now my dear friends and providers. Through some misunderstanding (the journalist was seldom sober) I learned that Brandts liked them and could sell them—a most improbable claim for any agent to make, but how should I know it? That was good enough. I resigned from Fyffes. A fortnight later I heard that Brandts had no interest in such raw work whatever.

There were but two sources of comfort: that the vast majority of my fellow men was accustomed to insecurity, and that my father, who had the innocent heart of a romanticist, seemed to think I had done something sensible.

He felt, I suppose, that I should waste less of my potentialities in literature than in bananas. He was quite wrong. I was far more likely to be a success in commerce.

I sold up the flat and went to live at a cheap pension in Bilbao, where my room was large and clean, and the society a joy after too many lonely evenings in Algorta. I was shocked to discover that for three years I had been living at twice the cost which was really necessary—though it is likely that only in the last year had my tastes broadened enough for me to enjoy the experiment.

About a dozen of us dined at a long table enlivened, once the carafes had circulated, by exchanges between a republican journalist and a secret policeman of the monarchy. That was the only occasion when I have seen Spaniards of fierce left and right opinions on terms of private friendship. It may have been because neither had any religion worth mentioning, or because they permitted themselves to be far ruder to each other than normal manners allowed. You cannot, after all, wish to shoot a man when you have been swearing every evening for years that you intend to.

During my round of good-bye visits a very typical Spanish characteristic appeared, which accounts for their attachment to the cacique or dictator in spite of a natural leaning towards irony and anarchism: the dog-like loyalty to any intelligent man whose ways have interested them. Their sense of deprivation went far beyond anything to be expected from mere mutual affection. They would give up bananas. They were alarmed. They had no trust. They would never be able to work with any other Englishman. All temperament, of course—but how I share it! I, too, attach myself to individuals. On the departure of a boss or a commanding officer or any close associate whom I like, I feel that the known world has come to an end and that all is insecurity.

The 700-ton iron-ore steamer, upon which some friend had given me a free passage, sailed north out of the mouth of the Nervion, and I suffered a little death as the green coast and the low, brown cliffs and the red gables of the Basque villages turned all to grey in the distant summer haze. That love for northern Spain, of which, while I was there, I doubt if I was fully conscious, broke surface, not in any exaggerated access of emotion but with a clarity of vision in which every ingredient of bitter regret was itemised. Is it general that those who can love greatly are so often deprived by not knowing that they do? Or is it, as I suspect, a particular curse laid upon the English?

Restlessly I stayed two or three weeks with my parents. My plan, so far as I had one, was to join Marina in Los Angeles and see whether the Hollywood studios, which had just turned from the silent to the talking picture, could provide a living. Since I had no notion how to sell myself nor indeed anything tangible to sell, it was the worst place I could have chosen. On the other hand I did not depend on anything so vague as proving my ability. I carried a powerful letter of introduction to a producer from the banker who was financing him.

My assets were about two hundred pounds, and a free passage to Colón at the Atlantic end of the Panama Canal which I asked Elders & Fyffes to provide instead of the small sum due to me from the pension fund. I am sure I could have had both, but my conscience was too guilty to beg for favours.

I might have reached California more cheaply, but I am glad I did not. To an open and romantic mind the excitement of a first ocean voyage in warm waters is unforgettable. The North Atlantic does not count. One is gently bilious from the whale-way wallowings of the

liner, and that is that. But the passenger on a ship small enough to dance to the movement of the sea who meets enough bad weather in the first three days to acquire his sea legs may then swoop along the white and deep-blue track of the trade winds exhilarated as a gull. And to me, who thought myself a traveller, the New World was so gloriously new. There was the tropical forest of which I had read; and, since it clothed the precipitous slopes of uninhabitable little islands, the upper surface of the jungle gardened by flowering creepers, that rare and lovely sight, displayed its massed domes like dark-green, red-streaked thunderclouds.

It was impossible not to feel a gallant adventurer while racing the flying fish to Barbados; but when the ship discharged me, and me alone, on to the barren wharf at Colón far too early in the day for my liking, though the sun which unmercifully fried my diffident flesh against the concrete seemed well accustomed to such hours, I felt far from a picaresque character. A lost, small boy was a nearer parallel, and I knew it.

Colón impressed me as the least attractive town I had ever seen—and this was not due to depression, for later experience convinced me that the Atlantic ports of Central America are, none of them, places in which to linger. The shipping agents knew nothing of boats to Los Angeles, telling me I should enquire in Panama.

Taken aback by the discovery, a little too late, that tropical rain has the volume of a bathroom shower, I splashed on to a train for Panama City, put up at the Hotel Europa and restored equanimity with Planter's Punch. A world in which so delectable a drink existed, as well as the thirst necessary to deal with two successive pints of it, could not be wholly bad. In the evening I set out to inspect North American civilisation.

I always wish that my first contact with it had not been at Panama. The full essence of Americanism in the Canal Zone is too overwhelming a contrast to the Spanish-American city. And that is a violent way to taste a new country. You might as well get your first impression of the British from the Gezireh Club in Cairo.

Clean, self-consciously bright, admirably ordered for the consumption of ice-cream in friendly surroundings—that was my melancholy impression. The result to this day is that when I think of the United States, its aspect as a respectable middle-class holiday camp dominates all others. And that is unfair. If I had entered by New York, I should have found the stronger living and coarser laughter to which I was accustomed translated across the Atlantic into a city of exquisite beauty, with green and peaceful farming country easily to be reached at need. But there it is. My emotions insist that every American lives in a well-ordered suburb, whereas statistics, let alone observation, prove he does nothing of the sort. I am closer, perhaps, to a spiritual truth—for it is undeniable that the nearer any foreign community approaches the ideal of a garden city run by a council of advertising managers, the more Americans are at home in it.

My journey and education were continued by a Japanese cargo vessel holding a dozen passengers in reasonable comfort. I was intrigued by the tact and persistence with which my steward overworked his inadequate English to find out why I had spent the first night on deck. The reason was simple. Ants were wandering about my pillow. I can endure fleas, bugs and cockroaches—since they share a familiar domesticity—and almost anything that has wings, but I intensely dislike the crawlers-in from the wild. The steward, however, suspected that I had deserted my cabin because I was sharing it with a Japanese; yet

would have laid open his belly rather than ask if his guess, humiliating to both of us, were true.

So there we were—the East suspecting the West of haughty empire-building, and the West indeed so far guilty of it as to refuse to admit in the presence of the East that it was afraid of a few small red ants. His relief, when I at last confessed their presence, was delightful; so was the immediacy with which a force of little men descended upon that cabin, stripped it to its white-painted bones, and re-created it in half an hour.

San Pedro waterside was as depressing as Colón had been—the more so since a wireless message had miscarried and Marina was not there to meet me. Reunited with her later in the day, I discovered that her pleasure in seeing me was swamped by horror at my rashness. I was inclined to agree. It seemed extremely difficult to get a drink in Southern California.

Alien, too, were other aspects of the civilisation. Next door to her flat was a marvellous conceit of architecture, representing a miniature Mexican ranch-house complete with imitation well, and upon the coping of the well sat, pretty obviously posed, a girl of artistically Latinised but genuine beauty to whom I was careful to pay little attention. After nightfall the girl's sister drove Marina and myself up the Hollywood Hills and then descended the hair-pin bends at fifty miles an hour with no lights on. I have often wondered whether it was her normal method of driving, or whether she herself was in love with Marina, consumed by jealousy and desperate at my insensitive reaction to pussy on the well.

I presented my letter to the producer who was melancholy and polite as some small rajah touching impossible orders to his forehead. He informed me at once that Hollywood needed the assistance of 'gentlemen.' I do not think he was being ironical. It was the heart-felt

cry of one continually frustrated. Yet he must have known that if Hollywood started to indulge the over-developed modesty and the over-cautious taste of the English upper middle class, the only result would be no pictures at all.

While I was waiting for undeserved fortune to fall into my lap, Marina, bewildered, fled to New York. I stayed on for a week or two until it became obvious that there was no immediate use for 'gentlemen' even when as synthetic as I, and that producers were not so obedient to finance as I had expected. Indeed, I was reminded of that frequent fate of eighteenth-century writers: to wait in the patron's anteroom until turned away by a footman. My sympathy had always been with the patron, and it still was.

So I followed Marina to New York, making a considerable hole in my remaining capital. I neither liked nor disliked the city. I simply could not get on terms with it at all—and how to extract a living from an unwilling world had been left out of my education altogether. A very proper omission in any university. I take it that a man who had passed high out of Harvard or Yale and gone straight into business would be as inexperienced as I, though the tradition behind him would be more helpful.

Meanwhile I had actually sold two short stories in England. I looked at my own printed work with dismay and astonishment, as if I had bound myself into slavery for ten guineas. However, I could now describe myself as a writer with truth in my voice rather than apology, and show my two tales as if they were mere samples of a hundred others. Slowly I was learning the American approach.

Not that it was to do much good to me, or to many thousands of native Americans, for the stock market crashed and the first wave of the Depression arrived. By the end of October 1929 my money had run out. Manual labour, if I could get any, looked the only possibility. But

I hung on. Nobody—for an almost wartime kindness was general—wrote me a rude letter demanding the rent of my two rooms in Greenwich Village, and I found (believing my past propaganda) that a diet of bananas and biscuits was adequate though leading to comic prodigies of flatulence. There was, in my private life, little else to laugh at.

It was suggested to me that there might be a pittance of some sort to be obtained from Funk & Wagnall's Dictionary. There was not. But Vizetelly, receiving me with a shaggy, donnish courtesy which made the exile homesick, told me of a children's encyclopedia which needed writers to prepare the articles.

I went to see the editor and delighted him with my sample articles on the set subjects. The formula was simple. You looked up the facts in an adult encyclopedia and rewrote them—being careful to avoid plagiarism—in the plainest English, opening with a sentence which would catch the interest or arouse the curiosity of a child.

Month after month I turned out some fifty thousand words of this stuff, and earned my five hundred dollars. This was enough to give me a comfortable life, for in 1930 the cost of living in New York was by no means high. I formed a useful collection of Italian speak-easies with cooking too palatable and cleanliness too perfunctory to attract much non-Latin custom, where a meal and a half-bottle of drinkable wine cost a dollar and a quarter.

In the spring of 1930 I became a sub-editor in charge of the rewriting. Rewriting was very necessary. The editor, a weak, harassed and lovable little man, had been driven by his employer to commission and pay for half a million words a month of whatever quality. The poor employer could not help it; he had planned his encyclopedia before the depression, and now was in the hands of his bank, his printers and anyone who would lend him anything on the

security of his face. Fortunately for us all it was an honest face.

But the result of his unavoidable impatience was that three-quarters of the material accepted was unpublishable and had to be rewritten in the office. The style we wanted should have been easy. It was not. The professional hacks were utterly unable to write simply. Newspaper training was largely responsible. The reporter has not the time to achieve absolute clarity. His stock-in-trade is vivid description in colloquial English—and colloquial English, when read for exact meaning, is very far from clear.

Having achieved a measure of respectability, I took a pleasant room in a brown-stone house of the East Fifties, and even moved a little in literary society. I was at last on terms with the alien culture and beginning to enjoy it. Any reasonable man can satisfy all his tastes and all his individuality in New York. My civil status was doubtful, for I had come to the United States on a tourist visa. The immigration authorities, however, were most lenient. When they would not extend my visa any longer, they merely told me to go, and to write to them from abroad that I had gone. I am always doubtful whether this was a humanely bureaucratic formula, or whether they did in fact put such innocent trust in a postmark.

Marina had long since returned to Los Angeles, and there her resistance at last collapsed. Why, only she could tell. Security I had none. My fidelity was not standing up very well under the delightful strains and stresses of New York. And she knew my tastes and prejudices too thoroughly to believe that a home in the United States was likely to be permanent. It may have been that either the irresistible force or the immovable object had to give way, and she preferred the latter.

The irresistible force, however, had burned out. I knew it, but I did not admit it. Still overwhelmingly fond of her,

I was. Still in love with her, I was not. I cannot altogether blame myself for refusing to face the ironical ending which the weariness of the years had forced upon the fairy-tale. We are far too conditioned by what we read, and when in life we come to a last page, we cannot resist the temptation to put on the conventional ending. The swineherd should have ridden off, fearful with doubt and regret, but coldly imagining that his destined princess might be still in the nursery—as indeed she was.

Immediately after our marriage I became a lame duck in good earnest. Without warning I was sacked. The reason was complex. Sub-editing had now advanced to the point where I was bound to recognise a handwriting, and could have questioned why work was being paid for twice—though in fact the minor racket would never have occurred to me. Later on, after some miserable months, I was called back by a new editor until all the sources of capital ran out and rewriting stopped.

Though I claim it myself, that encyclopedia down to the letter M—at which point the unfortunate publisher had to sacrifice his last dregs of idealism and send the rest of the material to the printer in its virgin state—was the best which has ever been produced for children in England or America.

Two years passed. I will not make the weary effort to reconstruct all the movements of Marina and myself between Los Angeles and New York. In the former I mostly lived on her; in the latter I may have barely supported her. A memory of incompetence and dejection remains. There were, of course, plenty of entertaining interludes, for she was always fun—if I did not spoil it—and her whole character was lit by courage and loyalty. She had as well a genius for friendship, even if her friends often seemed to me psychologically restless. Her human sympathy was so great that they were compelled to tell her

whatever was wrong with them, and skeletons would begin to rattle within half an hour of the first cocktail. Had they remained decently in their cupboards, social intercourse would have been more to my English taste. On the other hand, when I want to go to the help of a friend through his Slough of Despond, the way is still marked by the posts put in by Marina and, I suppose, by her father whom I never knew.

By and large, through odd jobs of nursing work that she took and my very occasional free-lance successes, we managed to eat and pay the bootlegger, a charming Italian and dear friend who grew his own grapes and made his own white wine and brandy in spite of prohibition. And one of our furnished houses I cannot look back on with anything but pleasure. It was at the end of a valley in the Hollywood Hills beneath and hidden from the roads which terraced the escarpment. Though ringed by Tudor or Mexican bungalows and their stream of automobiles, the valley was much as it had always been, except for an old bee-keeper and his shack, and into it I could vanish.

I was now able to pose as an authority on juvenile literature—a most original authority for I could actually produce the stuff myself. A sample play brought me a small contract from Columbia Broadcasting to write for their educational service, and in the autumn of 1932 they ordered some thirty dramatisations of the lives of historical characters to which the schools of the entire nation would listen, provided teacher could forgo, for a quarter of an hour, the sound of his or her own voice.

This was a godsend. I could write the infernal things in London, and do my best meanwhile to get back into business. A perverted decision it may seem, since I was obviously approaching the hotter and more profitable regions in the hell of hack writing. But never for an instant did I think it more than a wearing and useless way of earn-

ing a living, or consider, even in rare moments of self-esteem, that I was any sort of author. I had proved myself *débrouillard* and that was all.

I took passage on a Norwegian freighter which was sailing direct from Los Angeles to London. To my relief nobody checked my passport—which, besides being out of date and invalid, showed that I had no right whatever to be in the United States. I went on board with a cheerfulness which, while hardly fair to Marina, at least enabled me to understand her flights from Europe.

It was a voyage of solid discomfort. The food was of hard and mysterious substances which no doubt would be edible in an Arctic farmhouse at the end of winter. For the first twelve days, until a launch came alongside in the Panama Canal and transhipped its precious cargo, we were out of liquor. Meanwhile the captain had fallen in love with his only other passenger—a young woman of sloppy good looks and spectacular inanity—and his efforts to avoid a hurricane which continually threatened and never quite caught us were un-Nordically agitated.

Except in drink, when he put on a hearty Viking frankness and quarrelled with his mate or his young woman or both, that man was like a sullen and innocent schoolboy. When in the fifth week of the voyage his passenger retired in some agitation to her cabin for three days, I was quite unable to persuade him that appendicitis was unlikely or to prevent him filling the air with appeals for medical advice.

The skimmings across the blue Caribbean three years before had been youthful, but that interminable voyage was adult. It had its moments of grandeur and none of enchantment—except when near Mona Passage I saw the full circle of the rainbow, ending, as it must, in the sea at my feet and giving the impression that it was only some hundreds of yards in diameter. The immense colourless

swell on the edge of the hurricane heaved us day after day towards a sulphur-yellow sky which seemed prepared for the overwhelming of Gomorrahs; and in a gale off the Azores Leviathan at his most magnificent shared the same trough of the sea and sounded so that seventy perpendicular feet of him stood for an instant like a black tower built on unknown solidity. In that lashed world where one was protected from grey death only by the rail of the ship he was indeed Job's tremendous symbol of the adjustment of life to its environment.

I settled into rooms in London and set to work on the broadcasting contract which I blessed and cursed alternately. The long voyage had left me with no time to spare. On Mondays and Tuesdays I would read up the character I had to dramatise, foreseeing a fairly easy task if his life involved drums and trumpets and desperate difficulty if he were merely one of those Good Influences upon the World beloved by educators. On Wednesday I would look through my notes and decide that the job could not be done at all; on Thursday and Friday I would do it—just in time to catch the mail at the General Post Office in St Martin's and nowhere else.

Since Saturdays and Sundays were essential for recuperation, this schedule did not leave me much liberty. It was only in the early spring of 1933, when I had delivered the last play, that I could concentrate on the more genial task of getting myself back into commerce. Eleven years were too long an exile from London, and friends who might have helped were scattered. In any case I was far too proud to explain to anyone—in my own country—how desperate my situation would be if nothing turned up by the summer. There was good reason for diffidence. If I were asked why I had pushed away the ladder of a career and to what my life was clinging, the reply must involve far too many intangibles to be convincing.

I answered advertisements and myself advertised. I paid a large fee to an employment agency for supplying me with a circular letter and a long list of firms to which to send it. The letter was cunningly planned to show my value to any exporter, but the language was so weak and long-winded that I had to do a lot of tactful editing. The agency boss was startled by this concise expression of his ingenuities, and I could watch him hesitating whether or not to offer me two quid a week to draft the office correspondence.

Nothing came of it all. England was full of men with qualifications as good as my own who were out of work. In a bad business depression it is the more adventurous citizens who have to suffer; nor can they complain, since they willingly accepted insecurity for the sake of travel or quick profit. As rolling stones, they are bound to be hit by the rule of Last in, First out.

In London I felt lonely and *déclassé*, but it was a joy to rediscover my own country on foot. The best of these ecstatic walks led me over the Wiltshire and Dorset downs to Exmouth where my parents were staying. One night, footsore after twenty-eight miles, I tried to get a bed in Piddletrenthide, but it was the Whitsun week-end and the pubs were full. In the bar a pleasant fellow of about my own age pressed me to share his cottage room with the insouciance and courtesy of eighteenth-century road-travelling. He turned out to be the leading man in a fit-up theatrical company which was touring the villages, and next day he and the proprietor invited me to join them. If I had not been a married man I think I would have done so.

Conjecture toys delightfully with what my destiny might have been. At Bucharest I did once play the juvenile lead in a melodrama organised for charity by the Anglo-American colony, and before the King and Queen of

Roumania too. But only the royal sense of duty can have kept them in their box, and the throats of even my closest friends dried while they politely endeavoured to congratulate me. Never, I feel sure, could I have become an actor, but I might have sent for my typewriter and improved the fit-up's acting version of Sweeney Tod and Maria Marten.

Refreshed by exercise and inspired by the beginnings of panic, I composed a really effective advertisement for the Appointments Wanted column of *The Times*. After giving my education and languages, I described myself as an 'Englishman with no national prejudices.'

I was asked to call at the advertisement office. A senior clerk much resembling Strube's Little Man, with the same straggly moustache and a stiff shirt, extracted himself from a bay of mahogany—the office suggests a saloon bar which has run out of drink and is in the hands of a very respectable firm of accountants—and examined me nervously. Did I not think, he asked, that my advertisement might be open to misunderstanding? I thought nothing of the kind, and condescended haughtily to explain why.

It was only years later, when experience as a security officer had worn away the last of my innocence, that I perceived what had bothered the senior clerk. Though British fascists were still considered comic and communists impractical dreamers, the era of treachery was beginning. A lack of national prejudice might imply an equal lack of loyalty. Such a reading was in fact vaguely justified, for among those who answered my advertisement was a highly intelligent Hindu with whom, in an obscure office, I talked for half an hour without ever discovering what he wanted. At the time I assumed that his reticence merely covered doubt as to whether I would willingly sell drugs and pornography, or whether I should inform the police. But

he did not strike me as a man likely to be engaged in either traffic.

My 'no national prejudices' meant that I was prepared, unlike the majority of our brusque foreign representatives, to treat with anything on two legs as easily and courteously as Spain had dealt with me. And that, no more and no less, was understood by Percy Squire, the chairman of John Kidd & Co., manufacturers of printing ink. He was a dear, bad-tempered old autocrat who did just what he pleased with the firm—on the whole doing it very well—and had built up a useful export business by his own personal travels in years past.

He sent for me to Wine Office Court and explained what he wanted. Printing in Europe and the Middle East was often a Jewish trade. Germany was the chief exporter of printing ink. The Jewish boycott of German goods was far from absolute, but at least offered new opportunities. I was to go out and grab them. If I could not, I was to explain why. I was to live in good second-class hotels and not stick him with damned great bills as if I were selling coal, steel or ships. I was to get on with it before his British competitors woke up.

If I had been asked to choose my job, it would have been something very close to that. True, it offered little immediate hope of domestic life, but Marina and I were accustomed to this strange marriage which carried on the continual partings of early days. And in any case I could reasonably dream, if things went well, of opening a branch factory abroad.

I spent three weeks between Wine Office Court and the factory in Old Ford, learning how inks were made and—far more important—enough of papers and printing processes to be able to talk to a customer for five minutes with-

out giving away my complete ignorance. Fairly straightforward were the selling and shipping, the prices and qualities, the characters of existing agents, the tastes of their chief customers; and made still simpler by the close and affectionate relationship which developed between Reg Green, the export manager, and myself.

In July 1933 I started out through Scandinavia and the Baltic States. I have seldom in my life been so consciously happy. To be completely fulfilled as a commercial traveller for a small firm which was frankly doubtful if it could afford such a luxury certainly argues a lack of ambition; but in my youth I never possessed much, and disappointment had trained me to limit the little I did have to the immediate future. That in itself was an aid to enjoyment.

One cause for excitement may have been the anticipation of curious kitchens and irresponsible adulteries, but the other ingredients of my content need not be so cruelly analysed; they merged together into one glorious whole of delight which was reflective quite as much as it was sensual. I was free of the Europe which I so greatly loved. My salary was eight hundred a year, and no government could steal a penny of it in return for services I did not want. Much of it Marina and I were able to save, for I could make my expenses—though I seldom charged John Kidd more than a pound a day—cover everything except evening amusements and extravagant explorations of wine lists.

For the first time in years I was unconscious of any anxiety or nervous strain. In fact there must have been some, since my first trip for John Kidd still turns up in mild nightmares. I find myself wandering about Europe from capital to capital, selling nothing and vaguely wondering why I have not sent any report to the office. At the time, no doubt, I hid from myself an inquietude that I was not producing enough new business to pay my salary.

But all the early part of that first trip was and had to be exploratory. Scandinavia, the little Baltic States, Belgium and Austria were too close to the German frontiers, and the habits of their printers had been formed by German manufacturers. We offered too high a quality at too high a price. It was competitive, since a printer uses less of a good than of an inferior ink, but we expected the buyer to change his customs instead of changing our own.

It was a conservatism typical of the British exporter. Yet I think John Kidd kept it within reasonable bounds. They could not be expected to put much faith in the early reports of an inexperienced representative. Later on, when the little sample tins of blacks and colours which I posted home began to tell the same story in the laboratory as my reports on the managerial desk, they lowered their standards of what a printer ought to use and gave him what he did.

The routine of the pioneering was simple—once a local agent of sound financial standing had been caught. That was my first duty. Agents recommended by consuls and commercial attachés were generally too large and shiny, not of a type to visit printers bag in hand, and do business, continually interrupted, in a glass-fronted cubby-hole among the thud and rattle of the machines. It usually took some days of visiting paper merchants and printers' suppliers before I found a man who was willing to invest his money and energy in the marketing of British inks. When I had him, we would go round the printers together from nine till six, and occasionally amuse ourselves in town thereafter.

I do not think John Kidd ever had cause to regret my choice of an agent—except perhaps in one case where they extended very humanely and on their own responsibility a quite alarming line of credit. I must have learned in Roumania more than I suspected. I should not pretend to

any keener insight than my fellows, but when a man has started his career among businessmen with no ethical sense whatever he is inoculated against undue optimism.

It was not until I reached the shores of the Mediterranean that I really began to sell—partly because I was farther away from the German factories and their ubiquitous travellers, partly through those of my own qualities which blossom in the sun. An Englishman in northern Europe is expected to be true to type, so that an insular, honest and—to my mind—somewhat bluff north-countryman will lose no business through lack of manners; but in southern Europe the Latinised Englishman, accepting unhurriedly the local courtesies and conventions, comes into his kingdom. Success in Greece and Italy, Spain and Portugal reassured me, showing that I really had that character with which during the weary years in America I had—for want of anything better—credited myself.

It seemed to me that I had left Spain not a mere three and a half years earlier, but ten. There were they all, in Barcelona and Madrid, still selling bananas. And why not, indeed? I myself on my return from America had tried, very unconvincingly and with the sense of failure inseparable from retracing a path, to get back into Elders & Fyffes. The task of my former colleagues was not so genially expansive as it had been. During the depression every nation with a tropical colony had planted its own bananas and saved foreign exchange.

When the two capital cities had been well stocked with Kidd's inks, I was free to revisit the Basque Provinces. For most of the pious journey I stayed awake, eager not to miss the call of the porters and the hushed bustle around the sleeping-cars as the train stopped at Medina del Campo and Burgos and Miranda de Ebro—junctions where, on my return from Asturias or after explorations of the markets of Old Castille, I would wait in the station restaurant,

darkened but still alive, for the heavy express to come wailing across the Spanish plateau and carry me back to Bilbao and the sea.

In the north, though big printers were few and there were no Jews to boycott German goods, it was a point of honour to me that I should sell. Bernardino Garay in Bilbao and Macario Sanz in San Sebastian saw to it that I did—and also ensured that there should be no conscientious necessity to rise and do business at nine, since we were frequently very much awake till four. Printers? Were they not fellow members of the Chamber of Commerce? First we would get them interested and then we would discover an agent whom they liked. It was an inversion of the usual routine and it worked. I appointed a charming little anti-Nazi German who, settled domestically in a fishing village and doing a quiet trade in small machines, was somewhat taken aback by a be-Spanished Englishman, far noisier than life, hurling business into his lap.

It was a pleasant interlude. Too seldom does fate allow the homeless so to wheel about his mulberry bush that he returns into the heart of friends. Yet my regret that I had ever left the North of Spain was not so poignant as in America. Biscay, I knew, was still a country where I could live happily and where my eyes would be delighted by roof and village and green downs as freshly and continuously as in England. But to live there permanently? To surrender, like my new German agent, to its sturdy charm? I was greedy for more world—not yet, perhaps, for more object—before I settled my spiritual relationship to the map or my plain place in it. How I squared that restlessness with my longing for a branch factory and a suburban flat I do not know. The contradiction is one of the curses which lie heavy upon the man without a trade. He can only guess at what will satisfy him.

For some weeks in the middle of that first tour Marina

had been with me. She joined me in Brussels and we went on to Vienna together, where we recaptured a shadow of our old Parisian freedom. She had an awareness of enjoyment, when she *was* enjoying, as keen as my own, and a sense of humour which revelled in the rabelaisian as well as in those delicacies of feminine insight which can find and smile at butterflies in a winter room.

So on to Greece; and fresh to both far travellers were the ivory and white of Athens, the ivory and blue of the Gulf of Corinth seen from the hills above Patras. I do not know which of us surrendered to the clear divinities more absolutely, she for whom classical culture was an affectation or I who peopled every stone which was joined to another with the high voices of the dead. Nor did it matter, for the tangible realities of Greece remain unchanged. When you sit upon the quay at Eleusis eating cockles from the dripping hand of the fisherman, that dawn-of-the-world taste is no less sweet to the postulant than to the initiate.

But London intruded upon Athens. Percy Squire in one of his incalculable moods of savagery—entirely harmless if you were in the office below his, and could march upstairs and bully him back—suggested that if the business I had done was all I was likely to do I could not look forward to any steady future. That frightened Marina, and she took the usual boat to New York. It was a hasty, but not a selfish removal, for all she wanted was to take responsibility off my shoulders. She could always earn her own living in California.

Too soon. Too eager. A month later, when Mediterranean sales had made their impact, I was again highly popular in London. But Marina and I were creatures of our generation, of those 'twenties and 'thirties when the emancipated determined that the chains of marriage should sit lightly on each other. With such a view, it is

sheer folly to enter the contract at all. The chain itself, the pride in being bound, is the very heaven of marriage; if it is not, there is little point in easing it.

After a quick overhaul in London, my next trip took me to the Middle East. Excited by the first fringe of Asia I certainly was, but neither geographically nor intellectually could a Mediterranean coast be wholly new. My attitude was possibly nearer to a Venetian trader's matter-of-fact acceptance of differences than to that of the tourist who travels to see Arabs as it might be in an exhibition, or that of the benevolent officials who take the money at the gate.

I went first to Palestine, then to the Lebanon and last to Egypt. It is difficult to recapture first impressions of the Levantine coast when peoples and frontiers, roads and mountain villages were all to become so familiar. I thought the seaboard from Acre to Tripoli—sparsely decorated rather than spoiled by man, his villas and his agriculture—the most beautiful I had ever seen. I still do. And close contact with French and British administration has not much modified the first opinions of a free traveller.

The impact of French culture upon Arab seemed to me wholly delightful, creating a harmonious mixture of two ways of daily life, both equally valid for content. The impact of British culture was funereal. Yet British administration was sourly admired, and French uninhibitedly abused. To me, as to the French officials, that was quite inexplicable. They were inclined to ascribe it too readily to the intrigues of British agents.

The true answer is that the British way of life, its solemnity, its cups of tea, its women so intolerable in exile, its odd insistence that you cannot have both rectitude and vitality, was not a threat; it did not and could not permeate Levantine culture. But French influence did, and therefore was the more to be feared. To a European there could be no conceivable doubt that French-controlled

Beirut was a more liveable town than, for example, British-controlled Port Said. To a race-conscious Arab, however, Beirut was an insidious attack upon his traditions.

I met only one nationalist who from the bottom of his heart hated my country—though he bought my inks—and did not disguise it. He was an Egyptian newspaper proprietor, and I found it hard to take his opinions seriously. The Egyptian habit of dressing in cotton nightshirts, the patterns of which we only use for the covering of mattresses, had, I am certain, much to do with my lack of interest. One can listen to Arab robe or lounge suit; one can even put up with striped trousers and top-hat; but when a man continually brings to mind a morning hotel bedroom, with the mattress rolled back, the bedclothes upon a chair and the hairpins clicking into the vacuum cleaner, it is impossible to treat him with a respect which is more than verbal. That is a pity, since only the most sincere of nationalists could force himself to wear, unnecessarily, Egyptian national dress.

My Arab customers, Christian or Moslem, seemed much like southern merchants anywhere else, and as hagglers for price no worse than Greeks. With the desert Arab, familiar to me from Doughty and Lawrence, I had no intercourse at all—beyond, that is, an exchange of looks so penetrating that the memory remains with me to this day. He was, later knowledge suggests, a notable of the Aneyzi, robed and crowned, and he was striding up through the Jerusalem bazaar as I was wandering down. For a full two seconds he held my eyes with a bold, direct look, neither liking nor disliking, but appraising my qualities as a male animal—my manners, courage, capacity for poetry and fecundity. He might have been watching the paces of a stallion. To what conclusion he came I shall fortunately never know, but it astonished me that there were still men who could so examine a stranger without

discourtesy. In Europe such self-confidence died with the seventeenth century.

In spite of Arab charm, I left Jerusalem an ardent Zionist, for no Gentile could know much more than I of the miseries of the Pale and the dynamic faith in the promise. And there under my eyes was the promise day by day gallantly fulfilled. I suppose that, so far as pure emotion is concerned, I am still a Zionist, but the impartiality of the security officer has intervened. Israel for me is like a woman whom you understand with a profundity too bitter for clear passion. You wish her well. You watch her career with fatherly interest. You may even be moved by her youth to a momentary splendour of desire. But youth alone is not enough for beauty.

From Alexandria I took a little Greek steamer to Athens—more to keep an eye on credits than to sell. The Greek Easter overtook me, bowing but not quite breaking my exaggerated ideals of commercial politeness. It was necessary, the agent told me, that I should partake of the pascal lamb in the garden of a newspaper manager. I was willing enough. At ten-thirty in the morning I lapped my retsina—the resinated wine which temporarily destroys the taste for all others—in the shade while watching, mouth a-water, a spitted sucking lamb roasting in a pit. I ate heartily.

Would I accompany the agent to just one other important customer? Well, I had no objection. Lunch was already an impossibility, but a short sleep at my hotel would deal with the retsina. At twelve we tasted another newspaper lamb; at twelve-thirty, a machine-minder's; at one, a lithographer's; at one-thirty, a colour-printer's; from two to three we descended to rotogravure and the local comics in red and black. Every swallow became deliberate; every breaking of wind a gamble with nature. Not that I felt sick. The lambs and the wine were far too

good for so rude a rejection. All was prepared to stay in place, but the only way of accommodating each additional mouthful was to swallow it floating in retsina like a large pill.

After five hours of it I took a taxi to the foot of Hymettus, climbed to the top and came down in the dark with a raging thirst. Such memories confirm that one is but a guest in one's own body. Were I—and to me it is the same I—to climb today so mild a mountain with an even moderately charged stomach, I should imagine collapse with such intensity that I should probably witch-doctor myself into dying.

In the spring of 1934 I was back in Bucharest. Eight years had destroyed the last of Ruritania. Taxis had taken the place of cabs, and there were but two aged eunuch drivers left. Peasant costumes had vanished from the city except on Sundays. The dusty streets of white, one-storied houses were metalled, and flanked by blocks of flats. The Bank alone seemed unchanged, and, for the sake of old friendship, presented me with a magnificent agent who, even before the boycott, had declared his own private war on German trade. Two former chief clerks had become the Christian and Jewish managers. I found myself far nearer to them in spirit and understanding than I had ever been as a gay and unused apprentice. I mourned my gilded youth, but I did not regret that it was over.

The successful tour ended with Warsaw and blue-and-white Stockholm. I hoped with no very good reason for some months without travel; but July and part of August were all I had. Then John Kidd required me to get my visas and pack my bags and take that Spanish of which I boasted, and had indeed made proof upon their business in Spain, to South America.

I look back with extraordinary content upon the seven formative months which followed. I felt at the time that I could live the rest of my life in sub-tropical Spanish America. Even today when my ways are set and neither my Castilian nor my energy is any longer equal to three-quarters of the demands on them which I should wish to make, I would not complain if some eccentric fate compelled me to settle my family there.

Why should this be so? What was the secret of that sure attraction in a mere salesman's unadventurous round of the coast? The old Adam can be left out immediately. No one would exchange the variety of enjoyment which Europe offers to body and mind for the highly specialised pleasures of Spanish America; nor am I looking back nostalgically upon the beauty of the women, which again is a specialised perfection. In any case the object of my sole attack of infantile pink tou-touism was half English and half North American with nothing Latin in her except that she had been born in Lima and spoke beautiful Spanish.

Landscape, then? One could, I think, fall deeply in love with the little towns of Central America, high up in the long, green valleys between spectacular and unaggressive volcanoes; but unless a man were fortunate enough to be born in the highlands of Guatemala or Costa Rica, he would not go out of his way to choose them. Mexico, Chile and the *altiplano* of Ecuador attract me, yet for my taste they are not to be compared with Wessex or the Valley of the Loire or the coast between Bilbao and Oviedo. In fact I am no great lover of immensity of landscape, and to my eighteenth-century mind the horrid mountains bristle unnecessarily upon a pleasantly rolling earth. While I love to read of those who climb them, as of those who shoot elephants, I have not the slightest wish to compete. I am prepared to marvel at their conquests from Alpine and

Andean restaurants or from a safe seat in the zoo, but marvel is enough.

There is left only the South American attitude to life. It must be that which fascinates me, and it must be closely related to my own or to a romantic illusion I have of my own. It is a mixture of nobility and brutality—and by that I do not mean cruelty. I mean a quality which in youth tends to prefer the coarse flavour for its own sake, and in middle age at least refrains from shrinking. It is the utterly uncloistered virtue to which nothing human is alien provided it has power and individuality, and it seems to me more common in the Spanish Americas than anywhere else. Add to this import from Spain an easy gaiety and a cosmopolitanism which the mother country lacks; impress it upon every immigrant, British, German or Italian; and you have South America.

I leave out, quite arbitrarily, Brazil, though that was the first republic where my catalogues and I were welcomed. The Portuguese spirit is discordant with the Spanish, and a temperament which is in tune with one will not readily respond to the other. For most Englishmen Portugal should be the easier host, since it is an Atlantic country, conservative, tolerant in manners and darkly emerald as Cornwall. In both the people and their home there is a softness of outline; and, for myself, I miss the bitter and glowing virility of Spain. The two cultures are different as red gold and platinum. One is as fitted as the other to the finger of the Peninsula, or to marry through all impediments Atlantic and Pacific; but though the reflections of the grey perhaps be subtler I prefer the superb tradition of the gold.

Neither the roaring life of Rio de Janeiro nor the European solidity of São Paulo attracted me, but in Spanish-speaking Buenos Aires I was immediately at home. There I appointed an Anglo-Argentine agent, and

first came in contact with that contribution of my own country to Latin America which is more valuable than capital or railways. The adventurers in the sub-continent have always been the flower of our emigrants, rejecting the deceptive ease of a common language for the sake of a way of living which they loved. The permanent resident of British ancestry, whether or not he has retained his passport, is very much a man.

My agent I might have met in Europe, but not his father. He was eighty years old and had lived most of his life in the mountain forests of the far north-west. He painted the country vividly in words for me, and had, though quite untrained, painted it on canvas after canvas in a style of such marked individuality—something of Blake and something of Douanier Rousseau—that he was far nearer genius than amateur.

In the fascination which Latin America holds for me the presence of such observers also counts. I like to be near a frontier of the imagination, though I myself have no desire to be a frontiersman. Not for me are the handful of rice and what the worms have left in a banana skin; but to meet the men for whom such a diet was sufficient and to understand why it was, to feel that I myself may be the collecting point of memories and that from my own mind, if only for me, may come a synthesis of observations till then wholly unconnected—that is what I mean by a frontier of the imagination. Its proximity can only be felt in conversation, not in the reading of books unless scene and the way of thinking are already familiar—for to read of the unknown is not enough. To feel upon the frontier, one must be aware at first hand of the individual pieces of the puzzle, each depending on the observations of individual man or woman. Then even the garden where one dines in peace may have some bearing on problems of zoology, geography or archaeology.

I could not take the train from Buenos Aires to Santiago de Chile, since the line had been destroyed by landslips and the only communication between railhead and railhead was through the high passes by mule. I should have enjoyed this, but John Kidd were insistent upon speed, and I doubted if they would approve. So I went up to Mendoza at the foot of the Andes and waited for a plane.

Sharing my sleeping compartment was a Lithuanian Argentine whom I liked at once—an instance of the veneer of Spanish manners upon a European of little other culture. I cannot conceive myself so quickly at ease with a Lithuanian from Europe or North America. The next day, determined to show me Mendoza and its delights, he drove me out through the desert hills to a tavern and a swimming pool. There did not seem to be any living thing within miles but an Indian girl with long black plaits whom we contented ourselves with complimenting, her mother who ran back and forth with bottles of red wine, and a young goat which we grilled upon embers and ate—little by little and regardless of swimming with full stomachs. That country Argentine and I, though different in blood, background and education, had the same tastes. Without discussion or hesitation he had chosen for his hospitality to the stranger a place of lonely beauty rather than a place of crowds.

Very properly he allowed the evening to be governed by tradition and took me to the Mendoza public brothel: a glass-roofed palace admirably appointed and large enough to supply the wants—though I can but guess at statistics—of a city the size of Birmingham. It appeared to have all the tolerance of a good mixed club, for no one thought any the worse of me when I chose, abominating brothels, to sit upon one of the roomy red-plush sofas in the central hall and chat to the members.

The plane to Chile twisted like a startled wood-pigeon

through the high passes below the peak of Aconcagua, while I endeavoured to master the difficult art of sucking oxygen from the tube beside my seat without returning into it my lunch. Those were the days before pressurised hulls, and the crossing of the Andes was the highest passenger flight in the world. It lasted only an hour or so, for the southern Andes are just as narrow and abrupt as the hatchings on a map. I landed in a world of rushing water where every woman seemed to be attractive and every German sympathetic.

Though the standard of the first, in the two main cafés of the capital, far surpassed that of any musical comedy chorus, it was the second which most surprised me. Where Germans are concerned, my Europeanism is suspect. It is probable that their foreign policy during my lifetime has conditioned me to dislike their character, their language and their literature, and that in the days of good Prince Albert, given a German governess whom I liked, I might have been as fond of the Teuton as the Latin. But there it is. In every individual of pure English blood it may be that the battle between the Mediterranean race and the Anglo-Saxon—with the Celt as a casual umpire—still goes on and that one of them has to win.

But here were Germans, by passport Chileans and with Chilean wives and mothers, enjoying their mutual love affair with South America as thoroughly as the British and my solitary Lithuanian. The brotherhood of the Spanish-speaking foreigners, like the old brotherhood of the buccaneers, undoubtedly corresponds to a real and deep community of tastes. The book which for me best gives the flavour of the whole continent and its separate parts is *Tschiffely's Ride*. Yet Tschiffely was a temporary immigrant from Switzerland—the nation which of all others is the most self-satisfied and farthest in spirit from Spain.

I appointed as agents a firm of German-Chileans. They

did not care from what country their imports came so long as the manufacturers were honest and intelligent. Their opinion of Hitler was aristocratic; he appeared to be efficient at setting the ports and industries of Germany to work, but he was obviously too vulgar to last. They were thinking of him in terms of a Spanish-American dictator and underrating that German adoration of vulgarity which had been educated out of themselves. Both partners of the firm were Chilean to the core—though one of them could have played a Prussian officer in any movie. They opened the life of the country to me, and begged me to come back when I had finished my tour and stay. Given some capital, I might have done so. On the other hand, if I had had any I should never have seen Chile at all. Poverty has its advantages.

My memories of the journey up the coast from Valparaíso to Lima and Lima to Guayaquil are dominated by archaeology and history and the traffic of the small desert ports under the shadow of the Andes. The few passengers seemed to be all searchers: one for cosmic rays on the top of Mount Misti, another for gold in the Montaña, another, returning from the Eucharistic Congress in Buenos Aires, for new missionary fields. Business was excellent all the way up the Pacific coast, but the meditative part of my mind must have overwhelmed that which was satisfied by commerce.

My only regret is that I do not possess a Peruvian pot in the shape of two amorous and ecstatic cats which was offered to me absurdly cheap by one of the custodians at the pre-Inca city of Chan-Chan. As the export of antiquities was forbidden and all passengers were closely observed by the Customs when they returned to the ship, I think I was right in supposing that custodian and customs officer were in collaboration to improve their standards of living, and that the pot would have been confiscated and myself

subjected to a heavy official or unofficial fine. Yet the thought always haunts me that the custodian was genuinely short of money and appealing to me as one gentleman to another. If I had not been so suspicious, the cats, though heaven knows how I would have concealed them, might now be on my desk.

In none of the capitals did I bother to call on the British Legation. This was, I fear, a discourtesy; but agents, printers and their hospitable friends left me no time for my own countrymen. Experience in Europe had taught me that commercial attachés, while they might be useful to Government contractors and representatives of heavy industry, were never in touch with the sort of agent I wanted. They could see no difference between the honest, energetic businessman employing his small capital to the full, and the bright local boy selling buttons or dirty postcards on commission. Closer and most friendly contact with diplomats during the war has not changed my opinion. They are well informed about the trade and politics of the country to which they are accredited, but are too busy to know the middle class.

At Lima I was pleasantly rebuked for this attitude. Strolling off to dinner with a highly intelligent Englishman whom I had partnered at bridge, he asked me if I had called at the Legation. I said that I had not, and protested that I was very capable of travelling, selling and enjoying myself without its aid. He replied that he himself was the British Minister in Peru and Ecuador, and pointed out that though indeed he might have little to offer me—beyond the contents of his cellar and the attentions of his cook—I to the exile from London had much to give. That point of view had never occurred to me. The gilded youth of Bucharest had travelled too far to remember that he too, by courtesy of education, had once belonged to the Servant Class.

In Ecuador I temporarily replaced the Minister. My fellow traveller in the toy train which zigzags down twelve thousand feet from Quito to the coast was a former Vice-President of the Republic. He was a man of immense distinction, resembling a well-fed but still slender Don Quixote. At Riobamba, where we stayed the night, he decided to show me the town and—since the possibilities seemed to be limited—called upon the Mayor to help us. It was a memorable night, some parts of which I used, long afterwards, in a short story. In the morning we were inserted into the train—I hope regretfully—by a delegation of local politicians who had been informed by the Vice-President that I was the British Minister. This legend he had developed himself, wit piling upon wit, from an earlier statement about midnight that I ought to be the British Minister. And so, if only sympathetic misbehaviour had been enough qualification, I ought.

Nowhere else but in South America could a stranger have been so quickly judged, and accepted as a tolerable and discreet companion. The mood is not only for parties. By assuming that every individual will contribute such powers of entertainment as he has, a party generosity is carried into daily life. Sometimes it has a resemblance to the facile comradeship of youth—even when a Vice-President is in command—but it is still another cause of the fascination of Spanish-American manners for those of us who have surrendered to them.

Of Colombia I saw only the coast, passing between Barranquilla and Cartagena by the stern-wheel boat on the waterways of the Magdalena delta. The country was a great plain of tropical marsh where anything solid was covered by a convolvulus-like trailer, which then grew upon its own dead litter until it had formed a lump the size of a cottage. The Indian settlements where the stern-wheeler loaded and unloaded sacks and bundles were

indistinguishable from the bog except by smoke-fires lit on the doubtful shore to protect stevedores and steamer from the mosquitoes. At sundown and after, the insect life was all-pervading as air. Such individuals of the swarm as managed to penetrate my cabin—a wired cell with no furniture but a camp bed—were snapped up so promptly that my dislike of spiders was overcome by admiration. It was a journey which gave me some idea of the desolation with which the *conquistadores* had to contend, and indeed at Barranquilla I met one of them in person, four hundred years out of his time.

He was a Spaniard and a printer, and for some unaccountable reason we could not be separated. He was the original of Manuel Vargas in *The Third Hour*, and even in that boldly romantic novel I hardly exaggerated his adventures. He had blown up trains in the Mexican Revolution. He had been condemned to an Indian campaign in the swamps of Yucatan. He had travelled all over Latin America and at last settled in Barranquilla as manager of a printing shop—a trade at first unfamiliar to him as to me, but in which his flaming Spanish energy made dust of his more leisurely competitors.

I had a lonely Christmas in the port of Colón upon a formal and overfed Dutch liner which took me on to Costa Rica—a most friendly miniature republic where the coast was pure black and the highlands pure Spanish. The capital had even preserved the old communal bull-fight of Spain. I have never seen anything so dangerous. At one moment the ring was full of chatting, parading, laughing youth as in any Sunday square of any Latin city; at the next the bull was among them. There must have been over a hundred men in the plaza, eddying to form avenues for the bull and rings for any outstanding amateur performer. Yet the only casualties—and those not mortal—were

among spectators perched on the barrier who were pushed off by the enthusiasm of the crowd.

There followed a lazy week among my own countrymen on the s.s. *Salvador*, a little steam yacht of a ship which plied up and down the Pacific coast of Central America and upon which I was the only passenger. Usually we travelled in darkness and spent the day discharging into lighters in some forested bay where a ring of volcanoes, each with a little plume of smoke like that of the resting ship, suggested far-off industry around our dock. At mid-day with ritual exactitude the mate and I would drink three pink gins of such colossal size and lasting effect that I was peaceful as the sea till nightfall. He too, though a more distant and sardonic observer than the settler on land, knew very well that he was living as near to earthly paradise as he was ever likely to approach in his career.

I left the *Salvador* at San José de Guatemala—the most ramshackle port of all I had visited, where a sand road ran down to the shore between grass-roofed huts, and on the red-hot lines of the railway iguanas were stretched full length, regarding me, as I sat desolately upon my bags, with as little curiosity as the inhabitants.

Guatemala City was a pleasant and civilised spot except for the loud and continuous tinkle of marimbas. Like any other folk instrument a little of it in its proper setting was delicious, but, as the main recreation of a considerable town, the marimba too closely resembled the barrel organ—a hundred barrel organs turned at random by a hundred enthusiastic monkeys. There was also a festival for the selection of the Central American Beauty Queen. The standard was ethereally high and added to the mild exasperation caused by marimbas.

Apparently I chose an odd way to enter Mexico. It seemed straightforward enough. One took a train to the frontier, crossed the river by ferry and went on by rail

from Tapachula to Mexico City. When, however, I had followed my porter shuffling through the night down a track into the bush, had shied away from a coiled snake—fortunately dead—upon the river sands and had crossed to Mexico in a leaky punt, I realised that either there were few travellers between Guatemala and Mexico, or else they went by sea.

On the far bank the Mexican customs were in the open air. The counters, lit by flares, looked like fair booths. In charge of the passport bureau was a grim and magnificent young Indian, hung with pistols instead of obsidian knives and garlanded by a khaki shirt open to the navel. He at once and completely fulfilled all I had ever heard or read of Mexico.

He told me, with a fine contempt for all Europeans, that I could not enter Mexico, that my visa was in order but that I had no receipt for a large monetary guarantee which should have been deposited with the Bank of Mexico. The Consulate in London had told me nothing of this, and it looked as if I should have to return to Guatemala.

I forced myself to remember that this terrifying bandit was a part of that Latin America which I pretended to love, and that even a Chiapas Indian, fresh from revolution and probably an atheist, was still, by the grace of Spain and the Church, a *caballero*. And of course, when treated as such, he was. As soon as the flares were put out and the river bank was silent, he agreed to escort me to Tapachula and to allow me to cable London.

I spent three days in the little hotel at Tapachula waiting for confirmation that my guarantee had been deposited. It was the only period on the whole tour when I was bored. The town was wholly Indian and had the dejection of the full tropics. There was nothing to do, nothing to read, nothing to see, and I was not allowed to explore the dis-

trict. Largely I slept and ate strange fruits. Sometimes I watched the women washing clothes in the river. Sometimes I would have a drink with the bandit. Indeed I began to look upon him as my only friend in the overgrown infinities of the Americas. We parted with regret—though I do not know enough of the Mexican Indian character to say whether that was due to the cautious perfection of my manners or to his disappointment that he could not chase me, at the end of one of his numerous fire-arms, back over the sands to Guatemala.

Mexico City was a fitting end to a journey which had begun at Buenos Aires. Both have the feeling of grand capitals; between them are only the lovely cities of the Indies. For the cultured, even the over-cultured immigrant from Europe, Mexico City is the obvious first choice. Yet twenty years ago it was already in a state of transition, and I wonder if now it might not be more attractive to the lover of North rather than South America.

And what a market! It crowned a successful trip. At last I was faced by United States competition, and to cut into their trade, after dealing so long with the careful German tailoring of exports to the requirements of the buyer, was a holiday. The American salesman on his own territory is the acknowledged master of all, but in foreign trade he then seemed rarely capable of adjusting his methods to the social and business customs of the importer.

The stars which assured that in a Spanish-speaking country I could do nothing very wrong were swift to show me that across the border their protection ended. I looked forward to a luxurious railway journey to New York. So often in the past I had watched greedily the diners in the restaurant car but had to content myself with jumping off at a station for a hot dog. Especially I looked forward to breakfast. It is a humble meal, for which I have normally little use, but in its preparation Americans are supreme.

Even the French cannot claim so much. The finest Parisian lunch may be equalled for the unconventional by a Chinaman, for the rice-lover by an Arab, for the amateur of fish by that improbable outsider, a Portuguese, coming up on the rails with herbs and a frying pan. But no one, anywhere, can approach an American breakfast at all.

The train passed through the night into Texas, and I rose prepared for a bowl of orange juice, wheat cakes and maple syrup, and whatever the cook had prepared to go with his admirable bacon. Accustomed to the international trains of Europe where one currency was as good as another in the restaurant car, I assumed that the head waiter would change my Mexican dollars at a head-waiter's rate. But he would not—and there was I sniffing coffee with a thick wad of money in my pocket and unable to eat. I protested mildly, but he was having no nonsense about international trains. He implied that it was an American train which, averting its eyes from the shame, had been compelled to cross a frontier. He added, politely but inexorably, that guys who wanted American bacon should provide themselves with American dollars. Some forty-eight hours later I reached New York and dashed to the nearest bank, as hungry as I had ever been in the days of poverty.

I sailed from New York to Barcelona and went home by Madrid and Lisbon, appreciating them more than ever as the fountain-heads of all the splendour and good-fellowship I had encountered. In London Marina joined me, and at last we recovered that commonest of human rights, a home. She gave up hers for mine. On the other hand I gave up much of my character for hers. With profound respect for each other, we made the best of what neither would admit was a mistake. For four years, first with John Kidd and then as a writer, domesticity reluctantly endured.

Soldier

IN August 1939 I had all the attributes of peace except any desire for it. Although I was now an interested craftsman and acquiring an incredulous respect for myself, I was always conscious of some futility in the writer's life. I had watched the gropings of my Europe back towards the lights which had gone out in 1914, and had dared to believe that between the economic depression and Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland they had again flickered into life, if only for a few hours and in a few most favoured streets. My feeling for Nazi Germany had the savagery of a personal vendetta.

Yet if a smooth surface of life could make content, content I should have been. I had a London flat and a growing circle of friends, which I badly needed. Reviewers had been very kind to my first novel. I had a second in the hands of the publishers and I could see what I was going to live on for three months ahead.

On August 20th I received a telegram from the War Office requesting me—we were not yet on a footing of orders—to report within twenty-four hours. The urgency surprised and flattered me. No one had ever demanded me within twenty-four hours; next week was always enough.

I assumed that I was wanted to attend another course, not that the end and object of courses had arrived. As politically uninformed as any other member of the public, I could not believe that Hitler intended to strike eastwards after our guarantee to Poland and Roumania had made it clear that any more playing at soldiers meant world war.

It had been very different at the time of Munich. Then war had seemed to me imminent and in honour unavoidable. What use there could be for an able-bodied commercial traveller of thirty-eight—I was not yet wholly committed in mind to my new profession—I did not know. For active service abroad I was not trained. Both Civil Defence and Anti-Aircraft formations, for which I was easily acceptable, lacked the outlandish touch which I personally felt inseparable from war. Then came an announcement that men of good education and a military standard of health could join the Territorial Army Reserve of Officers. I took my place in the queue which snaked amiably through the courtyards of the War Office.

It was a considerable queue. There must have been at least five hundred of us on that morning of the Munich Crisis. From then on I never had any doubt what the ultimate result of war would be. My certainty was of course the wildest romanticism, growing upon one solid fact. Those hundreds in the queue, by their faces and bearing, were so obviously produced by a training more Spartan than any other country had imposed upon its youth. Many of them, no doubt, would have bored me to the point of any subterfuge for escape; most were still living in a Kipling world of the early nineteen-hundreds; some, like myself, had an extra edge upon their patriotism because war appeared so infinitely more desirable than sitting at a desk or looking for a desk to sit at. But the fact remained that they were a cross-section of a self-confident élite—far from perfect officers from the point of view of

handling men, far from a German standard of intelligence, yet with values so simple and assured that they would rejoice the heart of any commander.

Arrived inside the War Office, we sat at tables and filled in forms. I had not expected so many questions which I could answer with a hopeful affirmative. There was even mention of Certificate A, the existence of which I had entirely forgotten though I had acquired it in 1918. Its face value was comic, proving only that its possessor could command a company in the still Napoleonic manœuvres of the parade ground without tying it into a knot, that he could take a rifle to pieces and answer correctly written questions on the infantry tactics of the Boer War. But I have the utmost respect for it, since I never had any other military training and it sufficed. I had learned the first principle of the military life: that if you preserve a smart, alert and intelligent bearing, you will have ample time later to find out what the devil your superiors or subordinates are talking about.

The Munich autumn passed; in the winter I was summoned to have my languages tested. Nothing but life had ever tested them before. My Spanish turned out to be still fluent, profane and idiomatic; my French, serviceable for all ordinary purposes; my German, a wildly individual version of the language which could be readily understood by any person of goodwill.

Soon afterwards I received a letter inviting me to an interview. It was a mysterious letter, for it was not franked *On His Majesty's Service* but bore a stamp. Keeping imagination upon all the curb it could endure I called at the War Office and was shown into a room which seemed to me unnecessarily large. At the far end of it were a colonel and an exceptionally lovely girl. I restrained my eyes, fearing that I might be written down, in the too easy judgement of the English, as a man who had more interest

in women than duty. The real reason for Joan Bright's presence was not, I now feel, the primitive separation of honest rams from billy goats, but the value of her snap judgement. Her remarks—if I am right—when each of us had left the room would have been entertaining to hear.

Then came two courses in Intelligence Duties. The subjects of the lectures were utterly unexpected, for there was hardly a mention of the employment of spies or of security against them. Roughly speaking, we were being trained in the strategy of the coming war. We were never actually told that defeat was probable, but it was clearly foreseen that at the very best the meeting of the main armies would produce stalemate, and that victory might be destined for the side which could produce the most ingenious methods of breaking it.

The use and organisation of the commando, the opportunities given by the parachute, the rallying of large local forces by small parties of British, the art of guerrilla warfare—those were the main subjects of the course. All the underhand methods of tying down the enemy and destroying his confidence which began to inspire the public between 1942 and 1944 were prophesied to us and the technique explained in the summer of 1939. British military thinking was revolutionary. It had to be, for the War Office was short of any weapon but cunning. I remember that when a party of us was taken to the Farnborough depot, so that we might be able to recognise and describe the main features of our own or enemy armour, there was only one modern tank in the sheds, and that was a prototype.

Nothing was said of our intended employment—or indeed could be said, for no one could tell where in the coming war the fronts would be. It seemed to me pretty obvious that I should be used in a Spain which was fighting with the Axis, and I dreamed of my partisans in the remote

hills from the Cantabrian Mountains to the Picos de Europa.

When in August 1939 I reported to the War Office, the dream of Basque commandos vanished. It was to be Roumania. I had never given the country a thought. When tested for a knowledge of the language, I could not speak a word nor even read a newspaper. At my first visit to the War Office in that eager queue I well remember wondering, pen poised over the form, whether I had or had not the impudence to put Roumanian among my languages. But it was absurd to admit that one had lived in a country for four years and been content to know enough to call a cab. Still hesitating, I scribbled the nine letters. So small and insignificant and unnoticed an act decided the pattern of six years of my life and therefore all the far course of it.

My orders were to leave for Egypt in four days. Startled by the sudden conjuring of a Captain Household out of those gentlemanly courses and the last remains of youth, I went out and bought uniform. Marina, with a prudence which for the first and last time was fully justified, left for America. She remains in my life as a loyal and beloved friend. Out of the raw and passionate material which had forced itself upon her fourteen years earlier she made everything but a husband.

The four long trains stood on the waterfront sidings at Dieppe. Around them, in them, carrying their kit to them were naval ratings in uniform, and officers of all three services barely disguised in sports jackets and grey flannel trousers. I crossed the quay to buy bread, ham and wine for what promised to be a long and uncomfortable journey. The French, appalled, begged me to tell them whether this brisk and purposeful movement, so familiar to the middle-aged among them, was mobilisation. I denied it

impatiently. What we were and what our destination was no business of theirs. But the four trains, though they stood in the objective world of 1939, belonged to 1914 in the sad eyes which stared from every shop and café.

I knew their foreboding—the undismissible certainty that one has been at the beginning before and that the end must be the same. To me it had come in 1933 when sitting in a Brussels café I had opened the evening paper and found myself staring at a cartoon of sky darkened by German bayonets. It seems a mere nothing. But for ten years there had been no bayonets in cartoons. We did not think that in our lifetime there ever would be. No man or woman under forty can realise how unimaginable was European war to the casual citizen, the casual European newspaper reader in the years between Versailles and Hitler.

Yet to me and to not a few of us born about 1900 war was in some sort a release. We had been at school from 1914 to 1918, and our education, outside the classrooms and the monotonous games, was directed towards making us efficient officers. Our elders, first so senior as to be gods, then gods who had come down to earth, then near contemporaries, went to France and largely stayed there. We knew very well that the average life of an infantry subaltern in the line was three weeks. It did not bother those who waited any more than those who went. One is always the exception. It did produce, however, an acceptance of death as a possible, even a normal end of youth—the price which might have to be paid for satisfying our overwhelming, burning curiosity as to what it was really like to be under enemy fire, a question as intense as what it was really like to sleep with a woman. Merely to be told, however frequently and vividly, was not enough. Thus when the armistice came and still one was a schoolboy it produced frustration not relief.

So the circumstances in which I landed at Dieppe were a proud fulfilment—though indeed I felt something of a fraud since there were as yet no war and no danger and no doubt at all in my mind that anyone entrusting his life to my military knowledge would certainly lose it. So I had to be satisfied with the romantic pleasure—for such a sybarite as myself—of considerable discomfort.

The four trains were full of naval ratings for the Mediterranean Fleet, of the officers of Wavell's army recalled from leave, of essential civilians staffing harbours, depots and cables: of everyone in fact who had to be at his post before Germany could close the overland routes to the east, and Italy delay the passage of the Mediterranean. Warsaw and Bucharest might be cut off at any moment, so the Polish and Roumanian military missions were despatched to Egypt whence, by rail or air, they could move to their stations on the declaration of war. We were nearly all amateur soldiers, picked for our languages or special knowledge, and put in the picture—trained is too strong a word—by the same courses. We must have been the very first party of the new armies to leave England on active service. At least two of us did not see it again for five and a half years.

I can claim with truth to have crossed the length of the Mediterranean in an open boat. After two days and a night in the train, much of it spent on sidings within infuriating sight of Paris, we arrived at Marseilles and were taken on board the waiting cruiser. Seventeen hundred of us there were, and the ship could not have been fought and could barely be handled without treading on us. The two military missions, claiming to be so secret that they were not allowed to mix with their fellows, captured and held one of the ship's boats; and there, beneath the davits, some twenty of us lived and slept during the passage to Alexandria. The only unbearable hardship was the lack

of any alcohol. Food, though it largely consisted of bread and marmalade, was happily spiced by the speed of that treaty cruiser, reaching urgently across the Mediterranean at thirty knots.

The Polish mission flew off to Warsaw from Cairo, leaving the Roumanians at the Metropolitan Hotel—then less well known than later and still able to keep up superb menus for us, its sole guests in August—to wait in extreme luxury for the declaration of war.

We could only enter neutral Roumania secretly and as civilians, for the object of our mission was wholly destructive. Our orders were to deny Roumanian oil to the Germans if they invaded Roumania, and to concert plans with picked engineers of the oil companies and our opposite numbers from the French Army for the utter destruction of the fields and refineries. The Germans, naturally, would be aware that some such plot must be well in hand, but so long as there was no noticeable British activity and no sudden arrival of suspicious strangers they could only guess.

We travelled separately through Palestine, the Lebanon and Turkey, with reasonable cover as businessmen. I was forbidden to travel on my current passport which gave my profession as author. Authors, said the authorities, were immediately suspected by every security officer. Compton Mackenzie and Somerset Maugham had destroyed our reputation as unworldly innocents for ever. So I was given a new passport which stated that I was an Insurance Agent. Nobody could know less than I about insurance, but, as I did not have to practise or pretend to practise the profession, that mattered little.

As soon as Poland had been overrun, Roumania was helpless; but she hoped to delay invasion with her own army and such detachments of Weygand's army in Syria as could arrive in time to hold the line of the

Carpathians. We had three plans for the devastation of the oil-fields. No. 1 assumed the active help of the Roumanian Army. No. 2 assumed its complete preoccupation on the frontier, leaving us to do the job with the expert help of a field company of sappers, trained in demolition, which stood ready in Egypt to join us as soon as Roumania was at war. No. 3 called for the utmost possible measure of destruction in spite of the opposition of the Roumanian Government and Army. A few of the most trustworthy officers of the Roumanian General Staff knew all about Plan 1—and of course our identities—something of Plan 2 and nothing at all of Plan 3.

On arrival in Roumania I went straight to Ploëști where I stayed with Gwynn Elias, the fields manager of Unirea, ostensibly as an old friend and personal guest, to familiarise myself with oil, its machinery and its men. We had to be so careful not to compromise the organisation that frequent visits to the fields were impossible. Ploëști swarmed with Germans. The Americans and Dutch were neutral. And some of the bluffer British, while they could be trusted to blow up anything including, if necessary, themselves, were incapable of not talking loudly in cafés.

My colleagues had much better cover than I. Stanley Green had once been secretary of Unirea and could pretend up to a point that he was on special duty from the London office. Tim Watts, the angel of doom for the refineries, was a chemist from I.C.I. and entitled to take a reasonable interest in oil and its derivatives. But I could only remain as inconspicuous as possible, letting it be known that I was not anxious to return from this pleasant neutral country to an England at war. I spent my days upon Elias's living-room floor, carpeted with large-scale maps of the Tîntea field, and my nights, when we could all move around more freely, at conferences or bridge.

Even in South America I have never known anything

like Elias's hospitality to the prisoner in his house. They were the salt of the earth, those picked men of the oil-fields, keen, daring, ingenious and refusing to be beaten by any technical problem. All the essential work was done by them. We merely co-ordinated it.

But nothing happened. The expected German invasion did not come; the period of phoney war dragged on; the wives of the oil-men, who had been evacuated, returned to Plocești. Only one service had any immediate nuisance value, and that was of quite another organisation which took an interest in the aviation spirit shipped from Russia to Roumania and on by rail to Germany. Oil from the Roumanian fields was largely denied to the enemy by economic warfare.

When the plans, the responsibilities and the methods had been worked out, there was no further point in staying at Plocești and arousing curiosity. So we were all taken on to the staff of the Legation, following the German practice of giving minor diplomatic status to their professional toughs. Green, Watts and I were installed in an office of dubious propriety between the Military Attaché and the Air Attaché where, when we were not poring over our maps and elaborating still quicker routes and instruments of destruction, we ciphered and deciphered telegrams—an occupation of appalling boredom, since seldom was anything of more than routine interest allowed to pass through our undiplomatic hands.

The Military Attaché, Geoffrey Macnab, was a master of his art, never allowing his right hand to know too obviously what his left hand was about. Roumania, though it would be an allied country if invaded, was in fact neutral and very anxious to give no provocation. The Government was only prepared to look the other way so long as there were no Franco-British activities so open and

outrageous that the German Legation would be justified in protesting.

Geoffrey Macnab was responsible for our administration and discipline, but only for such operations as were approved by and concerted with the Roumanian General Staff. At first it must have been a nightmare for him to be encumbered with officers in civilian clothing, of God-only-knew what training, what background and what lack of discretion, playing casually with detonators in the next-door office and drinking very much more than was good for them. But never for a moment did he treat us as if we were anything other than trusted friends from his own battalion. We liked him so much that we tried to be sensitive to the lightest touch of the reins—a handy metaphor, though in fact he normally expressed incipient uneasiness by standing on one leg and wriggling the other.

During the twenty years' peace I had not considered the regular officer, when I considered him at all, as any asset to his generation. This was partly due to too much reading of the follies of 1914–1918, partly to personal observation of the fact that if you were capable of passing any examination whatever you could pass into Sandhurst. The War Office, the ship and Egypt had already suggested to me that I was wrong. Macnab, setting an example which I never forgot of how to command imperceptibly, added further evidence. I cannot remember an occasion in five years of war when I met with discourtesy or marked impatience from a regular officer. Professional ferocity, yes. Deliberate stupidity, no. It was always the amateur soldier, with an eye on his own importance, who was difficult. The professional trained between the wars, far from being doubtful and jealous of the amateur, seemed to cherish the new raw material with which the State had supplied him.

My tribute to him, as from a romanticist, is worthless;

but from the security officer, which for most of the war I was, it carries weight. By the very nature of my job I was a nuisance to busy men wanting to get on with the fighting, a perfumed staff officer to Hotspurs. But it was the regular, not the amateur, who always responded with good manners and good sense.

Our real operational command, oddly enough, was naval. All our detailed planning was directed by Commander Watson, as he then was. I do not know who picked him to lead so desperate and delicate a venture which was military from beginning to end except for farcical sideshows on the Danube, but the choice was admirable. He was straight out of any stirring saga in glorious technicolour—for most exaggeratedly naval characters have an astonishing gift for becoming what seafaring fiction and the taxpayers expect. He was a handsome man with cold, dark-blue eyes, and he had a natural as well as a naval talent for leadership, simple, unquestioning and unquestioned. I felt that my own expansive and only vaguely ruthless fire of duty was in him concentrated to a white flame. I cannot imagine a better leader with whom to go into action, although in following his example one might be offered less chance than was really available to live and fight another day. Had Watson leaned over my dying body I feel that my last words would have been notably patriotic, but to Geoffrey Macnab they would have been profane.

In February 1940 I was despatched to Egypt on a demolition course. For the first time I put on uniform, obtained a movement order instead of a ticket and was delivered to Dabaa in the Western Desert where the field company of sappers which was earmarked for use in Roumania took over my body.

I admitted that my military training had been of the sketchiest, and they were immensely kind. It is possible

that we who came down to them from Roumania appeared mysterious and heroic figures, in spite of pointing out to them apologetically that our only activities were to eat in two of the finest restaurants of all Europe and to attend a cabaret every evening. Romantic vision—which exists in the eye of the observer rather than of the participant—was more solidly based upon our appreciation of them. These were the men for whose technical skill and ability to fight off interference we were only pathfinders.

A fortnight under canvas with an efficient unit of high and happy morale made me more confident that the illusion would not be detected whenever I had to play the part of captain in any straightforward War Office production. With growing enthusiasm I blew craters, cut steel, stunned fish and my wrist-watch; and though the company had created for some miles around their camp a desert more formidable than that supplied by nature, they managed to find for the completion of my training a substantial roofless building of mud and stone. I am a most incompetent electrician, and it was one of the triumphs of my personal war when, after laying and wiring the charges myself, I pressed the plunger and the building disintegrated into noise and flame, hurling a large chunk of itself—for over-keenness had brought me a little close—in tribute at my god-like feet.

Back in Bucharest our unheroic life of luxury continued; we felt like parasites upon the unhealthy back of war. Secrecy was more essential than ever, and we preserved it; but there was no sense of speed or urgency to indemnify us. Ever since the assassination of Calinescu, the Roumanian foreign minister, by the Iron Guard, German influence had been increasing; but the Roumanians believed fairly firmly in the ultimate victory of the French and British. As soon as disaster in the West showed that we were no match at all for the German Army, it was clear that the mission

would not be allowed to destroy the oil-fields, and that the field company of sappers would be forbidden to land.

That brought our third scheme into operation: to do what damage we could with a handful of British oil engineers. Our objective was the high-pressure field at Tîntea. If we could destroy that, Roumanian output would be limited to the bailing and pumping wells. We believed it could be done by four or five small parties running from well to well, laying a heavy charge at the base of each Christmas tree which controlled the flow, and timing them to go off simultaneously. Whether all the wells would catch fire immediately was doubtful, though we had means of persuading them to do so. But in any case those pillars of gas and oil could never again be controlled by anything less than a specialist team from Texas.

The guards on the wells were still company guards, whose exact movements were known. We reckoned that they could be put silently out of action, partly by bluff from engineers whom they knew, partly by strong-arm methods. It was highly desirable to avoid loss of life. Since we were in a neutral country, killing was murder. When the wells went up, a score of torches lighting the eastern foothills of the Carpathians, we hoped to be racing through the night to Galatz and a waiting destroyer.

We were convinced that the plan was possible; and in theory it was. But in practice we should have been disorganised by the difficulty, which later and more professional commandos proved again and again, of any exact timing in a night operation. I think we could have sent up enough wells to make the field unworkable, and possibly to exhaust it, but the chance of the parties ever reuniting for escape was nil; so was escape without shooting.

Twenty-four hours before this spectacular act of sabotage was to be carried out, the Roumanians posted two military sentries on every well. Who betrayed us we never knew.

Such indications as there were suggested that the leak was not in Bucharest or Ploëști, but through the Roumanian Legation in London. It is possible that someone in authority had forgotten that the allegiances of major oil companies cannot, even in war, be too closely defined.

That was the end of the oil scheme for ever. In July one of our French colleagues was arrested by the Paris Gestapo while carrying a portfolio of papers which gave away much of the earlier and official plot. All the British employees of the oil companies were expelled from Roumania. We clerks at the Legation, though both the police and the liaison officers of the Gestapo who were now with them knew that our clerkliness was highly dubious, were permitted after much argument to remain.

War, if one has the temperament for it, may be enjoyable; but it is a most unsatisfactory setting for human intelligence. What is planned with infinite pains and care never happens; and what is unforeseen flurries the ant-heap to madness before petering away into unimportance like a short story which the author cannot finish. Success does not seem to depend upon the prudence which claims to control or guard against events, but upon creating an instrument which is not affected by events. The justification for our existence—if in fact there was any—came in Burma, where our techniques proved useful and two of the oil-men, by then commissioned in the Army, were decorated for gallantry.

Perhaps our studies were also of some use in the protection of oil-fields. Three years later I inspected the Kirkuk high-pressure field, drawn partly by duty, partly by curiosity, and found that the Tîntea plan had been utterly defeated by burying the Christmas tree deep in a bank of pebbles. To reach the vulnerable depths of it, the saboteur would have needed hours without interruption and a platoon of men with noisy shovels.

Bucharest put on high summer, which I drank in from the balcony of a delightful rent-free flat taken over from one of the most deservedly exiled, high above the boulevards. The monks chanted in the dark-panelled monasteries. The willows continued to cascade over streams racing down to the Danube with the last of the snow water, while the frogs sang and the buffaloes wallowed. The restaurants which jewelled with their flowers or lights the chain of lakes around Bucharest—all marshes when I was young—still offered white wine and gipsy music, while the night air breathing up from roots of rushes cooled the exquisite complexions of the women. Never was such a country as the Wallachian plain for shade and water in savage heat. Those summer months of 1940 were the last blossoming of Byzantine civilisation.

What could we do but enjoy it? No individual can be affected to more than a sigh and a passing anxiety by public ills so long as he has health, an amply sufficient income and a share of such luxuries as his impatient body demands; and if he has none of them, no perfection of national prosperity will ever persuade him to swing happily from bough to bough. My own enjoyment was little disturbed by the fact that the police seemed to have chosen me out from my fellows for special treatment. Indeed their attentions possibly helped to dispel a sense of guilt.

What their exact object was I never discovered—whether they hoped to make the Legation withdraw my union card, or whether they wished to impress the Iron Guard or the Gestapo by quite un-Roumanian energy. Probably we had unknown friends in the police who, when ordered to move a pawn, merely fiddled with it convincingly and withdrew their fingers. Sometimes I would be escorted to police headquarters, kept for a few hours in the waiting-room or on a hard chair in the passage, asked a few polite and inconsequent questions and dismissed;

sometimes two scruffy plain-clothes operatives would blockade my front door and compel me to unconventional exits and movements which they could easily have prevented if they had had any real interest in arresting me. It was useful to have a second establishment where one did not have to register on arrival.

The Legation flower garden was at its most spectacular. Unable to assist our country in arms, at least we were propagandists for its taste. The German collection of girls—handsome though it was—could not be compared with the British. One was an active patriot, her lovely eyes burning with the foreknowledge of public and private misery. Another, leaving politics to those who cared for them, had a skin of such individual and improbable texture that any New York beauty parlour, though utterly unable to analyse the cause of the matt velvet, would have paid her merely to stand in the shop. There was a Moldavian dancer, slim and statuesque, whose classic Greek face was the only one I have ever seen which had no sort of severity at all. There was a delicate young night-club singer, whose thirteenth-century perfection madly aroused the proper knightly mixture of chivalry and desire. And that is but to mention those who were above any mere film-star standard of beauty.

My own part in all this Persian horticulture taught me at last to speak Roumanian: effortless, with fair accent and sentence rhythm, and with little notion beyond the imitative why I was employing any particular grammatical construction. The lesson was too swift, for one Latin language—even when its forms and its loan-words are barbaric—destroys another. My Roumanian has vanished. My Spanish fumbles. I paid no other price for entering that fairy hill where the normal penalty is of shattered emotions or a sense of guilt.

Meanwhile disasters were falling hard upon Roumania.

The Russians, with German approval, annexed Bessarabia. The Germans, with Russian approval, decided to solve the Transylvanian question.

Imagine a cupid's bow with the arrow fitted and half drawn. The curve of the bow is the chain of the Carpathians. The string is the frontier between Hungary and Roumania fixed by the Treaty of Trianon. Between string and bow is Transylvania—a glorious, quiet country of hills and woods, not unlike the Welsh border of Hereford and Shropshire on a much larger scale, inhabited by Magyars and Roumanians inextricably mixed.

Generally speaking and subject to a mass of local exceptions, there were more Hungarian than Roumanian townfolk and more Roumanian than Hungarian peasants. Before 1914, under Hungarian rule, the Roumanians were treated as a subject race and allowed no effective political representation. Under Roumanian rule, after 1920, the Hungarians had equal rights, but were humiliated by the corrupt and pliant administration of a people whose traditions were Byzantine and whose religion was Greek Orthodox. Further bedevilling the pattern of nationalities were ancient settlements of German blood and language: some of them gentle Austrians, some blond and bumptious Saxons.

At the end of September 1940 Hitler superbly settled the Transylvanian question by an award which, ethnically, was neither better nor worse than the Treaty of Trianon, but placed Roumania at the mercy of any advance from Vienna and Budapest. A wedge of territory from the centre of the bow, corresponding to the wide shoulder and left arm of the archer, was given to Hungary, and the Roumanians were ordered to withdraw their troops, their administrative staff and all their official possessions within ten days.

This offered a marvellous chance to enter the cauldron

and observe whatever Hungarian, Roumanian and German movements were bubbling within it. We were particularly anxious to know whether any units of the Wehrmacht, in uniform or plain clothes, were involved. Geoffrey Macnab invited me to go with him and try to slip through into the abandoned territory. Even as a much-liked military attaché he could not get permission from the bitter and broken-hearted Roumanians. It was quite certain that I could not.

The luck was with me. While his car was stopped at the military control post outside Braşov and he was drawing all attention to himself and his arguments, the sentries impatiently waved me on, presumably taking me for someone who had legitimate business in the town. A moment later my Polish driver and I had the freedom of Transylvania. We raced westwards, like a speculative hearse, along the road to dying Europe, and soon began to meet the retreating columns of the Roumanian army.

All the roads were jammed with weary divisions on the final stretch of their 250-mile march to the east. Angry and unsinging, under a pall of hot dust, the men moved as the armies of all history, and as armies will never move again. They had only their first-line transport, drawn by oxen and horses, overladen with their baggage and barrack stores. They were forbidden by the treaty to requisition and evacuate the lorries of the abandoned provinces, and all their own motor transport had been used to empty the buildings of the civil administration.

The men were fighting fit and the field ambulances had very few occupants. These were allies of whom in a less scientific age we could have been proud, who would have fought over the exploding oil-fields with cheers and laughter if only the Germans had obligingly invaded a year before. I remembered the epic of the Battle of Maraseşti—possibly the only folk epic, authorless except for gipsy singers, pro-

duced in Europe during the twentieth century—which celebrated the sole Roumanian victory of 1917 when the peasant troops, incompetently officered, half-starved and decimated by typhus, lost their tempers and tore into the astonished Germans with cold steel. We used to ask the gipsy bands to play it whenever there was a party of the enemy enjoying its meal. In the last few months they had sadly refused.

The next day, driving south across the path of the rear-guards, we returned through the pass of Petroșani into Roumania proper. I cannot remember why. Probably there were rumours of German units in the south-west which had to be investigated, or information was wanted on troop movements in the pass. After exploring the country around Craiova, we turned north again into Transylvania by a forest track which the map suggested was passable for vehicles in summer.

Hour after hour, congratulating ourselves on avoiding all control posts but increasingly aware that the car could never be turned back, we crept downwards over rutted turf winding so closely among trees that in places we had to manœuvre as if extracting the car from a crowded parking place. Towards midnight this Hans Andersen path led us out into a world that was the dreamed ideal of human beings ever since the Golden Age. It was a world with no government at all.

The Roumanians had gone. The Hungarians had not yet arrived. There was, next morning, a curious sense of apprehensive freedom. Magyar-speaking peasants were pleased, but frankly admitted that in that district of mixed population it was not worth while to upset the peace between neighbours. Roumanian-speakers were sad but comforted themselves—for in adversity we believe anything—with thoughts that Transylvania would be isolated from war and politics. Both nationalities walked in the

streets or sat outside their cottages waiting, doing no work, savouring the quiet of this strange day without military, without police, without even a post office. Torn papers flapped lazily around the forecourts of barracks and public buildings. Official windows, blank and black, were pointless decorations to the squares which they had overawed. There were no flags.

But it was time to watch the arrival of the triumphant Magyars. We drove north-west, crossing the axis of the advance, and were nearly caught behind it when the wheels dug themselves in on a soft hillside where we were hiding and observing simultaneously—with perhaps a balance in favour of the first.

A small column of armoured cars was advancing below us, with another in the distance on a parallel road. Both were preceded by motor-cyclists in black leather jerkins and with slung carbines. Such modernity was overwhelming after the dust and the ox-carts; but comparison was hardly fair. Had the Roumanians been feeling their way into empty country, preceded by their toy Renault tanks, they would have appeared equally up to date.

The Hungarian advance guards, though fast in open country, were stopping to ensure that all centres of population were clear of the potential enemy and to instal the new administration. We were able to by-pass them and race ahead. We were now in a wholly Magyar-speaking district. The village streets were decorated with triumphal arches. Outside *gendarmerie* or church were welcoming tables of food and wine.

We were hungry and thirsty; and this air of civic rejoicing, though we were far from invited to the party, was irresistible. My Polish driver made a suggestion of a simple daring which would never have occurred to me. Our Legation car had no diplomatic number-plates but it did possess a Union Jack to be flown from the radiator cap

whenever a real diplomat was in it and on official business. This jewel of a chauffeur proposed that we should put it up.

The Legation had its pick of the Poles. On the collapse of their country, any military who could still pass between the Russians and Germans escaped into Roumania. If in uniform, they had to be interned; but if they managed to appear at the frontier in anything remotely resembling civilian clothes, they were treated as civil refugees. The Roumanians, moved by a people they liked and a fate which might well be in store for themselves, gave them all the hospitality they could afford. The British, too, could and did help. Lord Forbes—now the Earl of Granard and then an extraordinarily able boy in his middle twenties—had flown himself into Bucharest in 1939 and bullied the Legation, which had no job for him, into letting him take over Polish refugees. Later he was appointed Air Attaché, but his hobby remained Poles. Whenever a reliable man was wanted for any job, speaking any required language, Forbes could always recommend one. This driver was his own, and a particular pet. He had a most sympathetic disregard for the consequences of his actions. To have no nerves, you need to have no country.

At the next village, flying the Union Jack, we were received with roars of applause and, when we stopped at one of those hospitable tables, overwhelmed with bread, meat, bottles and questions. Who were we? What were we doing? The Hungarians had a bad conscience at accepting Transylvania from the hands of Hitler. They were delighted to see the British flag. It promised that there was still opposition to the Nazis.

I explained that I was the Official British Observer. My speaking of the despised Roumanian aroused only interest. After long experience of the League of Nations and its commissions empowered to report upon the treatment of minorities, they thought it astonishing that any official

observer should speak either of the local languages. It is a depressing thought that all international investigations are conducted through interpreters with an axe to grind.

The quenching of their curiosity and our thirst was interrupted by the roar of the Hungarian advance guard coming up the road. We bounded into the car and vanished. Once out of sight behind the nearest kindly contour, panic gave way to the healthy optimism of wine. It was cowardly to go on ahead, skimming the cream of the sandwiches under a false pretence, when duty demanded that we should observe the actual occupation. It seems to me now that duty demanded nothing of the sort, but at the time I was possibly taken in by my own propaganda.

We folded away the Union Jack and drove into the next little town a few minutes ahead of the motor-cyclists, adopting a stern and selfless pose like that of the mounted police officer who rides a quarter of a mile in front of a procession and ignores the premature cheers. Our right to park among other cars opposite the reception committee was not questioned. The public was busy craning its neck, and no officious authority, for another happy half minute, existed.

There was little to see but general enthusiasm and what looked like a brigade staff. Accompanying the Hungarians were a car of German newspapermen and a car of observers, more official than I, with Nazi arm-bands. The hated symbol on that hated, military flesh was curiously unreal. Both they and I were prohibited from wearing uniform in a neutral country, so that I could hardly be considered a spy; nor, however romantically I tried, could I feel that I was anything so definite. On the other hand I had no right whatever to be in Hungary—though the mayor was only now signing his oath of allegiance—nor to take notes of troop movements.

The rejoicings covered a discreet withdrawal. I was far more nervous when we passed through Bistrița, a sulky Saxon town now flowering with swastikas which had been forbidden by the Roumanian Government, where the inhabitants had no immediate excitement to take their minds off the presence of a stranger and nothing to do but stare suspiciously and make futile half-gestures of blocking the road.

There was now little empty space between the advancing Magyars and the angry Roumanians looking down from the mountain-tops into their lovely lost province. We began the gloomy climb, up through the pine forests of the Dracula country to the new frontier. At the top, above the trees, the road was barred. An attempt at bluff, a swearing that I lived in Bucharest and was happy to be able to return to my dear country, merely brought the bayonets forward from a yard to six inches. After all that humiliation the Roumanian soldiery was thirsting for blood, and any foreigner would do.

We were rescued by a young lieutenant of security police who ordered us to return to Transylvania. When I flatly refused and showed him my diplomatic union card, which at least proved that I was normally resident in Bucharest, he jumped into the car and escorted us down to Vatra Dornei for interrogation. He was a pleasant and civilised fellow, and I remarked, with the light-heartedness of a clear conscience, that I hoped I should not be shot. The prospect did not seem to him altogether absurd; he answered that Roumanians shot no one without court-martial. It then occurred to me that I had in my notebook, besides bits of information on Hungarians, details far less scrappy of the Roumanian order of battle. It was just that touch of professionalism which the amateur soldier so enjoys.

Little Vatra Dornei was half garrison town, half holiday

resort. In spite of all the excitement across the border, it preserved the peace of Sunday evening. There was laughter to be heard from the cafés and, over all, the song of the water rushing down to the Moldavian rivers. The lieutenant, marching a little behind, directed me to the office of the Deputy Provost Marshal. He did not bother with my Polish driver. Whatever the man had been up to, there was no doubt of his status and political sympathies. The Roumanians were usually generous to exiled Poles.

The D.P.M. was not in his office. His clerk thought he was at home. We went to his home. His wife thought he was at the office. The security lieutenant, seeing in time the pit which yawned at his feet, quickly lied that we had not yet been to the office. In after years when I too was in control of frontiers—though not, thank God, ever responsible to a D.P.M.—I used to remember my Roumanian colleague with affection. I doubt if I myself, in the obstinate pursuit of duty, would have been so quick to anticipate the worst as he.

But there his tact ended. He must have suspected how his commanding officer was spending the evening, but he saw no reason why so commonplace and traditionally soldierly a sport should not be interrupted with as little ceremony as a British officer would interrupt a game of bridge.

He dragged me round the hotels, and at last we ran the D.P.M. to earth. He was upstairs in a bedroom. The security officer knocked and entered, leaving me in the passage. There was an embarrassed female exclamation. The D.P.M.'s voice rose—quite literally, for it started at divan level and continued at the height of a standing man. His eloquence was so fascinating that I never thought of getting rid of my incriminating notebook. The strip torn off that unfortunate lieutenant was the most uninhibited

exhibition of discourteous military cursing I have ever heard.

When the lieutenant came out, I suggested a drink. He accompanied me, still silent, to a café table. I did what I could to restore his equanimity—praised his country, his army and even his government, told him that I had watched the retreat and that no other troops in Europe could have effected it on their feet in time. He hardly spoke at all. At last he told me to take my car and driver and go quickly before he changed his mind.

It was not that he believed me innocent; nor was it wholly humiliation that on such a day of national mourning his commanding officer should spend the evening in pleasant dalliance. What shook him, I think, was the taking of amusement so seriously that interrogation of a highly suspicious character in a time of crisis could not be immediately arranged. The D.P.M. might in his defence have pleaded—if he had ever heard of him—Sir Francis Drake and his game of bowls. But he was not a man to explain himself to subordinates. He personified the middle-class bully who is the greatest justification of communism in any peasant country. For the lieutenant nothing was worth while any more, and it was easier to get rid of the patronisingly sympathetic foreigner than to endure his eyes.

A day or two after I returned to Bucharest, the end came. King Carol abdicated. Antonescu and his fascist Iron Guard took over the government. Already one hotel was packed with German officers in civilian clothes. Since Roumania was still officially neutral, the accredited diplomats stayed on. All the more equivocal British organisations were loaded into a ship and despatched from Constanța to Istanbul.

Our last act was to get rid of our store of explosives which could not possibly be left where they were. That was a nerve-racking night, for several cars had to pass

through the capital and out into open country while the roads were busy with the disorganised activities of police, military and the Iron Guard. If one of the cars were stopped, and its cargo of gelignite, gun cotton, detonators and the timing devices of the saboteur were examined, the Roumanians would be justified in interning us for the duration of the war. But safely we sank them, punt-load after punt-load, among the tall reeds of a lake, and intemperately, when all was done, we drank the white wine of our bold host who had provided the waterside villa and the boat.

Of the original Roumanian mission some, during the long wait for action, had been claimed by commercial warfare, by the fringes of diplomacy and by other branches of Intelligence. The only simple soldiers left were Stanley Green and myself. He had some right to the name, for he had seen active service, under age, in the first war.

We reported to GHQ in Cairo and began to look for jobs. Egypt in October 1940 was still a preserve of the regular army. If the amateur had not been sent out from England with a definite posting or was not a local resident with special knowledge of the Middle East and its languages, he was nobody's responsibility and was very sensibly encouraged to raid the military branches for himself and grab whatever work he thought would suit him; a fair parallel would be the seeking of a job in peacetime through the streets of some immense, self-sufficient industrial centre, full of friendliness and short of men. What I had been doing was known; what my training had been was not. So I polished my Sam Browne, attended to my saluting and let them speak for me. I was determined not to be stuck in an office.

First we tried to get into commandos, then still in their

infancy, and were frankly told that bath chairs were not included in their transport. They were right, of course, but it was a shock. I did not like being forced to consider the fact that in another month I should be forty. After a year in Roumania I thought myself fully capable of drinking commando or commanded under whatever table there might be, and of carrying on subtle and destructive warfare from any mountain-top. It did not occur to me that I was rather less capable of climbing there than I had been, seven years earlier, upon Hymettus.

Green in his explorations—eventually leading him to control of refugees, for which his imaginative kindness and instinctive understanding of eccentric mentalities perfectly fitted him—discovered the existence of something called Field Security, and recommended it to me. It sounded congenial—the only branch of Intelligence in which a free-lance could enjoy the care and companionship of a unit under his own command.

I called at Field Security Headquarters and was interviewed by the Commandant, Robin Wordsworth—an amateur like myself, chosen for his excellent Arabic and his experience of administration in the Sudan, who had been for a year or two before the war a Dorset farmer. He had a welcoming face, burnt by the desert as by his own concealed emotions, which was attractive to men and even more to women. He was in urgent need of officers with languages, and took me on with no apparent hesitation. I was supposed to attend a security course of three weeks at the depot. I never did. Even as a security officer it was my fate to be taught by experience.

A few days after I had, in principle, joined, I was hanging about the Commandant's office and reading all the manuals and directives on the functions of I (b): the defence, that is, of the army against the enemy agent. An exclamatory conversation was going on between Robin

and his adjutant on the utter impossibility of finding an officer to take a Field Security Section to Greece at short notice. I proposed myself. At least I knew my way about Athens, could read a menu in Greek and choose from it intelligently. Within a week of landing at Alexandria I found myself back there, but now bivouacked on the sands to the south of the city with my tiny independent command around me in the darkness. Here at last was fulfilment.

To right and left of us were other small units or detachments under other junior officers. We were settling down to open tins when some Poles appeared out of the night and told us that a hot meal was ready in their camp if the men would come up with their mess-tins, and that they would be honoured if the officers would dine with them in mess. That was typical of Poles. I doubt if any British unit would have been so generous. Hospitality to casual visitors was normal, but hospitality to two or three hundred could never be explained on paper. It occurred to me much later that the Poles had impulsively driven a most improper hole through the security of our move. We had not been mysteriously left on the dark sands for nothing.

The next day we were shipped to the Piraeus on the Australian cruiser *Sydney*, then covered with glory from a successful action in the Mediterranean. I was alarmed to find myself the senior captain on board, and therefore O.C. troops. But the centuries-old routine of this—to me—astonishing organisation, the Army, could deal at once with a situation so preposterous. Where there was an O.C., it appeared there had to be an adjutant. To appoint one who had travelled out to the Middle East in a troopship and had some idea what duties devolved upon an O.C. troops was my first and only responsibility. I was installed with some state in the Captain's day cabin—he himself sleeping on the bridge—where I learned in peace the lecture notes of the course I had not attended, and at

intervals wandered round the mess decks with my adjutant, looking, I hoped, benevolent.

Arrived in Athens, it was immediately obvious that nobody knew what Field Security was for, nor how it should be used. That was often so in the early days of war, and the general ignorance tended to make a section self-reliant and to weld it into a unit of enthusiastic specialists. We ourselves knew exactly what we were for, and how to sell our services to the doubtful or unwilling.

A Field Security Section consisted of an officer, a sergeant-major and twelve N.C.Os. Its transport was a truck and thirteen motor-cycles; its armament fourteen pistols and a typewriter; its other lethal weapons, its comforts, its blankets and its furniture, when it had any, were whatever it could more or less legally acquire. Being all men of a type to accept life as they found it, under the guidance of a sergeant-major chosen for his knowledge of army routine, a section prided itself on taking intelligent advantage of the military passion for papers and was hardly ever at a loss to account for its cherished, corporate possessions.

The primary duty of an F.S. section was to take precautions for the security of the division or corps to which it was attached—which meant in practice discreet supervision of all civilians with whom the formation came in contact, and, after successful action, the policing of enemy territory until the arrival of trained administrators. We also had to investigate leakages of information, deliberate or accidental, which could be an unpleasant duty. But serious cases were very rare, and security was more soundly assured by lectures and friendly contacts than by officious action. I do not think we were ever unpopular among the troops of the Middle East. Plain common sense showed that the protection we tried to give was necessary.

Instead of attachment to corps or division, a section

could be posted to a capital, a port, a frontier or any district where the curiosity of enemy intelligence was likely to be active. This was far more interesting work than pure military security, for the section became the eyes, ears, languages and mobile reserve of I (b). It had nothing whatever to do with the employment of spies or the collection of information from enemy territory.

The section which left for Athens at the beginning of November 1940 was military, and attached to a force under R.A.F. command. After the Italian attack on October 28, five British squadrons were sent to the help of the Greeks together with port operating companies and detachments of all the base services. My duty was to look after the more elementary points of their security in a country which was not at war with Germany, where German agents, diplomatic or not, were therefore free from interference. It was a very limited freedom—as ours had been in Roumania—for the Greek secret police under the dictatorship of Metaxas were subtle and active.

I found that Lord Forbes, the Air Attaché in Bucharest, had flowered into a Wing-Commander and was the senior intelligence officer on the R.A.F. staff, so I decided that he should give us our orders and receive our reports. This was, in fact, partly correct, but I should also have been reporting to my Area Commander. He accepted my word that such a course would be most irregular.

That was a pity, for when in later years I came under Colonel Robinson in Beirut and Amman he handled his Field Security with a lovely light rein. Perhaps, unconsciously, I taught him; and he, in return, taught me how the Regular Army expressed its most violent feelings without ever, for one moment, being impolite.

I cannot remember why it was that we could never get an efficient guard on the Area Headquarters building. Certainly the fault was mine; but I was then too inexperi-

enced to be able to afford that confident geniality which comes from a knowledge of the powers one has but does not use. Finally, to force the issue, one of my over-keen N.C.Os entered the building in civilian clothes, wandered where he would and stole the Area Commander's current correspondence off his desk—none of it, somewhat to his disappointment, secret.

I thoroughly disapproved, but the wretched act was written down as permissible. So next morning I called with an apology to return the evidence that a proper guard was essential. The Area Commander was out and I was not prepared to hand back his papers to anyone else. I went off for the morning to visit my detachments and when I came back the correspondence had been missed and the world alerted.

With the now useless apology I presented myself. Clear-eyed, without passion, artistically, Robinson summed me up and lectured me. He quite understood, he said, the difficulty of my duties, but if security units were to wear the uniform of the Army and be considered part of it, they should share its standards, perhaps old-fashioned, of gentlemanly behaviour. I heartily agreed, but could not say so without putting the blame on a subordinate. When I had recovered my equanimity in the nearest bar—for I had never been on the mat before and was utterly terrified—I decided again that I liked the Army. This was not the verbal murder I expected, but more resembled a difference of opinion forcibly expressed.

Athens was a wonderful school in which to learn the procedure and customs of the military, for it was a GHQ in miniature, containing detachments of almost every branch. With this free staff course going on outside the office, and, inside it, my old Cornish sergeant-major with years of experience in the Military Police, I no longer had to fall back on guesses. By Christmas I felt pretty confident

that I knew the ways of this hierarchical, socialist community, and that if a great many years of my life were destined to be spent in it, as seemed highly probable in those days when Russia was still an unfriendly neutral and America an unlikely ally, there was no reason at all why they should not be enjoyable.

The biggest daily job was the security of the airfields against sabotage or too close observation, and the protection of the crews from the results of their uninhibited gossip. They were out night after night in their old Blenheims and Gladiators and when they were not they would relax in the Athens cabarets. As soon as the young Squadron-Leaders realised that we were starry-eyed in admiration, well understanding that long hours of ironic conversation with death demanded an easier listener, they gave us wonderful co-operation. The R.A.F. officer has always seemed to me a better psychologist than his counterpart in Army or Navy. I suppose he has to be. The spirit of the individual is so important to him and so much more vulnerable.

There was, however, a line of defence more reliable than fatherly talks: control of the cabaret entertainers. This was done by the Greek police, and mercilessly. The contacts of the artiste were watched day and night; the poor girl had to choose between enforced virginity and an official protector. The protectorate was a closed shop, and Field Security was not eligible.

Athens was a clumsy and difficult town for any such amusements. When our little force arrived, hospitality was overwhelming. To pay for a drink in a tavern was nearly impossible, and the troops were freely invited to Greek homes. They were not so over-civilised as to consider Greek womanhood a trifle primitive. On the contrary, they found the girls feminine, gay and virtuous. Sometimes they fell in love and pestered their commanding officers

for permission to marry; sometimes they indulged in simple preliminaries which would appear quite innocuous at home, and were beaten up by soldier brothers.

Even Colonel Xenos, a formidable figure who held the whole of Greek security in his hands and had under the Metaxas dictatorship heaven-only-knew what powers of death and exile, was puzzled and embarrassed by the problem and used hesitatingly to discuss it with me. Not only did the Greeks, in peacetime, have a puritanism which elevated the virginity of a girl and the fidelity of a wife into symbols of inhuman importance, but they honestly felt that in their country's extremity any indulgence of the flesh was wrong. The army, fighting in conditions of desperate cold and discomfort on the mountains of Albania, heard rumours of our luxurious living in Athens and reacted exactly as our own men in 1944 who, when they had not seen their wives or girl-friends for five years, read of the exploits of highly-paid American and Canadian troops in Britain. But the Greeks did more than grumble. When the bachelors came down on leave from Albania, they swore to have no pleasure that was unattainable for their comrades. And, by God, most of them kept their word!

Requests for reasonable facilities for the troops were considered improper, and matters which could have been smoothly arranged in western Europe remained a cause of mutual embarrassment. Allied relations had begun with a difficult incident. To find room for headquarters and base units, schools, hotels and public buildings had been emptied in a hurry. Among the latter was a hospital for the ladies of the town. It did indeed form an excellent billet; but the Greeks, in their passion of welcome and patriotism, had not considered the effects of letting the ladies loose on the streets. Thereafter both sides were

inclined to preserve a more than Victorian reticence about the facts of life.

All this straightforward military security—women, waiters, civilian employees, strangers hanging about Piraeus docks for no good reason, or questioning British troops with native Greek inquisitiveness which was almost certainly innocent but might not be—kept me busy consulting and contributing to the files of the Defence Security Officer—a civilian—and of the Greek police.

Among the police themselves there was conflict. Some admired the professionalism and liberty of action of the Gestapo—an admiration which is common and perhaps inevitable in those responsible for the security of any strong central government, though usually unspoken except in drink. Others concerned themselves as little as possible with current politics and gave a straight loyalty to the Crown. A third party—and they of course were the most pro-British—loathed Metaxas with good liberal exaggeration of his comparatively mild and few iniquities. They were the best contacts and informants of my men, who were consequently troubled in mind. They had enlisted to destroy fascism in all its forms, and found themselves in fact collaborating with the secret police of a dictator. I had to impress upon them that if the devil were fighting Mussolini, the devil and no one else was our ally.

Though a mere observer of the intrigues, I was sometimes considered a person able to influence events and liable to take an interest in Greek politics. It was no use to insist that I knew nothing of politics and was only a junior officer in command of a handful of military specialists; I was still expected to keep up the Compton Mackenzie tradition. My profession had nothing to do with it. That was unknown, and almost forgotten by myself. It was just that Greeks always tend to hysteria in their view of Intelligence. In spite of the fact that I had no money to pay

agents and, if I had, no notion of what to do with them, even I, in rare moments of depression, could think of myself as a spider in the centre of a web. But the clear sky of day and the heartening and bitter retsina of the nights never failed to convince me that in reality I barged through webs without seeing that they were there, and that I had no more ability to build one than a bluebottle.

No secrets, then? None at all in what we did. We were never nearer the heart of things than supplying guards on the Legation for the visits of Eden, Wavell and Wilson. In what we knew, however, there had to be much that was highly confidential—not such a mass in Athens as later, for Field Security was still considered to have more affinities with the Military Police than with Intelligence. But even then it occurred to me that the variety of information known to each F.S. officer—and never discussed unless in the way of duty among ourselves—was quite extraordinary. Nobody wanted to give it to us, but there was often no alternative. When you are the sole person who can produce a silent and reliable N.C.O. as an escort or a messenger, and when you are controlling the exits and entrances by a port or frontier, the wheels of Intelligence cannot run smoothly without telling you when to look the other way. You may not always know the why, but you must know the who and where and—sometimes most secret of all—by whose orders. In my four years' experience I never remember a case where this confidence was abused.

About half the personnel of F.S. was drawn from commerce, teaching, journalism, the law, the stock exchange: men of education with languages or experience which specially fitted them for the work. In those early days promotion from lance-corporal to lieutenant and then to captain could be very rapid. We also had a stiffening of regular soldiers, some of them from the Military Police. As

a general rule they were not much use on any Intelligence duties except routine controls; their years of training, however, were invaluable in any emergency, whether the section was operating under conditions of discomfort or of actual danger.

Besides these, we had a sprinkling of men who had lived in the Middle East and enlisted there, speakers of Greek, Arabic and Italian. We could never make soldiers of them—for we had not the time or the technique—but if they could be trusted to work alone and did not take too romantic a view of themselves, they were the most useful of us all. Other branches of Intelligence had a deplorable habit of stealing them for their own mysterious purposes, and we could seldom get them back.

We were never too military, and discipline was informal. When we did go through the traditional motions of parades and inspections, we performed them in a spirit of holiday—for the close, mutual trust between the section and its officer made the continual practice of obedience so obviously unnecessary. Daily relations in a crack section between the Field Security Officer and his N.C.Os much resembled those between a fatherly sales manager and his salesmen. But each section had its own individual character. In some the smartness of the men—when they were in uniform—and the atmosphere of the section office were reasonably regimental; in others the place looked and sounded like a salesman's office in Soho. And these were sometimes the best when it came to the real job of detecting enemy agents.

Our fairly leisurely Athenian life came to an end in early March when the British, Australian and New Zealand expeditionary force began to arrive at the Piraeus. The camps sprang up under the olive trees of Attica, and the German diplomats, whose forces were poised on the Bulgarian frontier and ready to strike, naturally showed an

interest in the enemy. The most glorious row I ever was in occurred when I was ordered to send a motor-cyclist to tail the German Minister's car and report what he did.

I put the N.C.O. in uniform. It still seems to me sensible. If the Minister, pretending to be a nice, kind uncle, were to talk to any of the troops, my man had only to warn them who he was. But apparently I should have put him in plain clothes and, by not doing so, had caused a diplomatic incident. Rockets from the diplomats descended upon the staff, and were passed on to me. I should certainly have been sent back to Egypt in disgrace if Colonel Xenos had not stood up for me. It was pleasant to know that the liaison between a junior captain and this powerful servant of the King had been friendly and useful enough to cause him to intervene.

On April 6 the Germans attacked, and with Yugoslavia overrun there was never a hope of holding them. The Military Mission which had been in Athens since the autumn knew that defeat was certain, though preserving in public set smiles of triumph and confidence. The planners in Cairo had done their loyal best to prevent any such pessimism gaining ground—and certainly it never reached the formations—but why they should have assumed that their colleagues in Athens with the same evidence in front of them would not come to the same conclusion I have never been able to understand.

If our history of the last sixty years could be plotted as a graph, the Greek disaster would fit neatly into the ever-recurring conflict between political idealism and the facts of power. To the microcosmic England of myself—at bottom far more typical of my countrymen than it pleases me to think—the conflict was as plain as in any leading article. I suppose it is now pretty generally agreed that our action in Greece had no effect whatever on the course of the war, and that the suggestion that it delayed Hitler's attack on

Russia is an excuse which will not hold water for a moment. Yet I am proud and I was proud then that we had permitted generosity, whether real or a political gesture, to overcome common sense. The value of the expedition, if it had any, was at bottom religious. It emphasised the fact that the British Commonwealth, now forced into a long, savage war of national defence, had at first intended and still intended a crusade.

The night after the declaration of war the German air force struck at the Piraeus with overwhelming physical and psychological effect. The bomb damage itself was by no means irreparable, but a lucky hit was scored on an ammunition ship. Attempts to tow her out failed. Alongside her was a loaded train. What good Field Security thought it could do at the docks I cannot imagine, but the tradition was growing that, like newspapermen, we ought to be on the spot and able to report first-hand anything of interest to security. The troops and the crews had been evacuated from the port. The ambulances had come and gone. The Area Commander—another one, this—was strolling casually through the dust with his cane under his arm and his monocle in his eye. He seemed to think we had done well to come, but would be wise to go. Half an hour after we left, the ship blew up depositing her bows, on an even keel, in a little public garden two miles away, where, bronzed by fire, they looked like a memorial to lost mariners by an over-realistic sculptor.

The Greek armies in Albania collapsed and disintegrated. They were worn out. For six months they had exposed to the whole world the emptiness of Mussolini's claim to have made of Italy a great military power. Humiliated before his allies and enemies, he had continually employed fresh reserves out of all proportion to the importance of the campaign; and still the Greeks held or advanced. But there was nothing left, in material or

human spirit, with which to form a new front against the Germans.

I had watched the Greek civil and military refugees pouring back into Athens by the Eleusis road, and given hospitality to odd N.C.Os of the divisional sections who had become hopelessly separated from their units and ridden back to Athens for orders. I knew, too, that the more mysterious purveyors of Intelligence, who always appeared to place an excitable value on their lives, had secretly embarked for Egypt. But I could not really believe that final defeat was immediate and present in the room until on April 24 Patrick Wilson, son of the Commander-in-Chief, told me to take my section west, and to keep a professional eye on the security of the vital bridge over the Corinth Canal and the beaches near Megara where an Australian division would be embarked. That done, I was free to get the section out when and where I could.

We left Athens in the late afternoon. The road from Megara to Corinth, cut into the escarpment between hills and the sea, was a first taste of war. There was no cover, and plenty of evidence that it was visited by enemy aircraft. Our little convoy of a truck and thirteen motorcycles lost no time in reaching the flatter coast beyond, and bivouacked for the night.

In the morning I left detachments at the embarkation beach and the canal bridge, and took half the section to Nauplion. On the way we passed the ruins of Mycenae and, since our timetable was our own, it seemed a pity not to visit them. The official guide was delighted to have work. As a servant of history, he was entirely undisturbed by transient accidents upon the distant road and in the sky. Far too overwhelmed by the present was a party of Greek air force mechanics and ground staff who cowered in the beehive tomb of Agamemnon. They too were living

in a world of their imagination, but he who had only the lions upon the grey gate to guard him was the happier.

Late that evening I was back at the beach, to learn that the Australians had come and gone without embarking. All that was left of them was a mad private who, it was said, had chased the beachmaster over the sands and caused some alarm to his staff before it withdrew to launches and the horizon. The private was still firing shots and chasing the ghosts of beachmasters through the scrub, but that was no reason for not getting some sleep.

I shall never forget the quality of peace in that still night as I lay on soft gravel in my sleeping-bag. I cannot explain it. Rest in the open air of April Greece? An awareness of romance due to too much reading of boy's stories at too early an age? The feeling that as a close-knit unit we were equal to anything which routine duty or own safety might demand? It was peace such as a shepherd might feel when the dust had settled, and the raiders who had dismounted and drunk at his well were gone.

At dawn the mad private, delighted to find that his peace, at any rate, was shared, disturbed us with random fire. It was difficult to know what to do with him, for he did not seem amenable to my scientific and Marina-like approach. One of my sergeants, rising hastily from his blankets, had stuffed his .38 pistol into his trousers pocket. Endeavouring to draw it—an unnecessary gesture since my own was already backing up psychiatry—he shot himself through the foot. Bloodshed seemed at once to recall to the soldier his normal life of the previous weeks, and he willingly consented to be handed over to some passing compatriots.

The vital bridge was now in the hands of the sappers who were to blow it up, so I collected my detachment and took the road to Nauplion. Memory refuses to distinguish between this and the previous day, offering only random

events. A Greek youth shot clean through the middle of the neck from right to left, and apparently none the worse for it. Mile after mile of burning and abandoned transport. A formal request from the section that they would be vastly obliged if I would stand up in the truck and spot for them since they could not hear the noise of planes above the roar of their motor-cycles—a point which would have occurred to any properly trained soldier. The dive-bombing of my truck outside Corinth when the driver and I took refuge beneath it and he, who *was* a regular soldier, remembered too late that it was the worst place to be. The wish, unique in my life, that I had filled my immense and irregular bottle with water instead of whisky and water. It was a fair sample of life, a rushing eagerly hither and yon to objectives which in reality were of such little importance that memory rejects any logical sequence for them.

The whole section was reunited at Nauplion, a little town still shivering from the unexpected impact of war where the main street was a gravel-bed of broken glass which crunched under foot. A plume of smoke rising above low hills marked where the s.s. *Ulster Prince* had gone aground in the channel and was burning. The troops which should have embarked in her were scattered around the town, and their officers were summoned to a conference which I attended. I knew none of them, nor the commander of the force.

The conference was told that there was no longer any hope of getting off from Nauplion, and that the ultimate destination would probably be Kalamai in the south of the Peloponnese. This seemed to be a good tip for masterless men, though I doubted if our worn transport would stand some eighty miles of night driving over rough roads.

I returned to the lane where the section was waiting for me and explained that we had finished our duties—unless something unexpected turned up—and that our return to

Egypt depended on our own endurance and ingenuity. We destroyed all our baggage, and started off with the truck empty except for the impulsive sergeant. He was in good enough form for the journey, since his bullet, by astonishing luck, had passed between two toe bones without shattering either of them.

The road was mountainous, and as we were driving without lights the surface seemed worse than it really was. One by one, like the ten little nigger boys, either a man or his motor-cycle gave up. The first went into the truck, the second into the ravine which was always on one side or the other of the road. We did not meet or pass a soul, and how I found the way I cannot imagine. Possibly my mind was so concentrated on map-reading as to exclude my usual optimistic turnings; more probably the road led to Kalamai and nowhere else. The last motor-cycle was hurled to destruction, and then we were all in the fifteen-hundred-weight truck with enough petrol but very little oil. It crept gallantly on until we ran into the tail of an Australian convoy, hopelessly jammed outside Kalamai with dawn an hour away.

An Australian Field Security Section was helping the military police to sort out the traffic. I learned from my opposite number that this was the Australian division which should have been taken off from the Megara beaches, that it was trying to disperse under the olives before dawn and that if it could not and the movement was spotted by enemy aircraft, heaven help any ships which tried to evacuate us! Our own fighter squadrons had been finished long since.

Nose to tail, in two lanes, the vehicles crept up the main street of Kalamai. It seemed an interminably long street. Seeing a narrow gap between two houses where it was unlikely that a truck could be spotted from the air, we turned into it and stopped. It was broad daylight, but the

stream of traffic had now thinned to small convoys racing for cover. It cannot have been more than five minutes after the road was clear and innocent that an enemy plane came over and circled like a hopeful vulture. The entire division held its breath lest some fool of a battery commander should open up. There was in fact one single shot. It sounded like the beginning of a conversation suddenly suppressed. The German observer must have seen that there was a scattering of troops, but nothing to suggest the presence of a division.

We slept for a couple of hours in a ploughed field behind the houses. The behaviour of the Greeks reached an unbelievable ideal of allied conduct. Neither here nor on the road did we hear a word of reproach. They were confident that we should return victorious, having as little forethought as ourselves of that commonplace of folk-lore that when the devil is down he merely changes, Nazi to Communist, his shape. A kindly villager brought us bread hot from the oven; another brought wine. Those who had nothing—and they were many, for there would be little food in Greece when our abandoned rations were finished—gave praise and sympathy.

I set out refreshed to explore the area, and discovered a considerable British force—base units which had gone straight from Athens to Kalamai some days before—with many officers whom I knew. They were pessimistic. Since they had no arms but rifles and the Germans were already in the Peloponnese, the only prospect was ignominious surrender. They seemed to know little or nothing of the presence of the Australians.

Under the circumstances it was the obvious duty of the section to take to the hills or find its own transport to Crete. We disliked capture as much as anyone else, and the prospect of being interrogated rather more—though in fact it turned out, when in later campaigns the occasional

Field Security N.C.O. was put in the bag, that the enemy treated us correctly and as any other prisoners-of-war. I went down to the port with a Greek-speaking N.C.O. who was a master of the long, unhurried negotiation of the Levant, and we found a tug-boat captain who himself was willing to run for Crete rather than work for the Germans, but warned us that his engineer would never agree.

This was a challenge to the section's enterprise. Continual contact, on the tug and in the cafés, kept up the captain's courage and prevented him changing his mind. Another Greek-speaker investigated, without arousing suspicion, the opinions of the engineer and the harbourmaster. A third detachment circulated among the British troops with orders to find one or two who could stoke and run a marine steam-engine, and to be professionally mysterious about their motives.

I still mourn for my requisitioned tug-boat upon the high seas—although, to judge by what happened to those who escaped in boats which offered a still smaller target, we should have reached Crete in the dinghy or not at all. Later in the day my sergeant-major, who always believed in comfort, discovered the top-secret information that the Division were to be taken off after dark. He suggested that we should do a little port security work and be taken off as well.

My conscience was not altogether happy about this. I felt that we ought to stay with our own people. On the other hand I could not deny that I was perfectly prepared to leave them by tug. Manifestly my attitude stank of pretences, especially since I had permission to get the section away when and where I could. So, with a sense of anticlimax, we patrolled the quays and, as soon as there seemed to be a shortage of Australians, embarked in the tender ourselves.

The next night there was an attempt to evacuate the

British which failed because the Germans were already in the port. It was certainly wise to give priority to a first-class fighting division, whether British or Australian, but I see no reason why some of those defenceless base units on the hillside could not at least have stood in a queue. On our own ship, a liner of over ten thousand tons, there was room to spare.

I had expected—having heard of such things in the first war—to have some trouble on paper with my sergeant's self-inflicted wound. But of course there was none. My statement that it was an accident was at once accepted and recorded. When we were all comfortable I went to my luxurious bunk in a cabin for two. And there were only two in it.

In the morning I saw that we were one of a convoy of four big ships with destroyer escort. I do not know whether the other three had embarked their troops at Kalamai or elsewhere. For the rest of the forenoon I was somewhat preoccupied by the reverberation of metal. While dreaming in a delicious bath, walls, pipes and tub were suddenly turned into a cacophonous iron drum. Leaping into the passage, I found myself among other naked, soapy and enquiring officers. We were on the whole reassured to be told that the shock to our innocence was only a near miss from a bomb. The same thing happened after breakfast when again meditating, though now not prostrate but enthroned, the pipe connecting me with the outer world appeared to be hit by something the size of a minor planet. I decided to spend the rest of the day in whatever softly padded saloon there might be.

On deck the Australian machine-gunners were having the time of their lives. I saw them bring down one bomber, and they claimed two more. So far as small arms were concerned, the fire power of that ship was terrific and must have startled the enemy pilots. But those of us who were

not serving a weapon were not allowed to watch; when the next wave came over, we were lined up in an alleyway, three decks down, to stand and listen. Although my conversation was cool and my face, I trust, casual, I found that my knees were gently and imperceptibly knocking together and that the cliché of the fiction writers was true. Ever since I have considered that the highest courage is that of engine-room staff who go about their business when the enemy is kettle-drumming upon the thin steel which separates them from the sea.

One of the convoy broke her back, but the destroyers saved every man on board her before she split in half and sank. The rest were hardly damaged and, next morning, out of range.

Back in Cairo it was considered that our escape not only accorded with standards of common sense but with those of military panache. As I wished to be credited with the first and nothing would have induced me to confess, at the age of forty, to a preference for the second, that was satisfactory. I spent a few lonely days of leave at Port Said, missing the section and looking forward with the eternal hope of the predatory male to sentimental companionship—which did indeed surprisingly offer itself, but I could not find a word to say to the girl. There is nothing so destructive of desire as to be bored by the artificiality of one's own conversation.

The next job was the most exhausting upon which I have ever had to concentrate. Thousands of refugees had escaped by sea from Greece to Egypt—civilians, military in civilian clothes, foreigners of doubtful antecedents, Sephardic Jews resident in Salonica whose ancestors had been expelled from Spain, Aschkenazy Jews driven on from country to country by Hitler's advance, policemen with democratic sympathies or now frantically pretending them, cabaret girls, honest peasant families who had fled

in such momentary hysteria of panic that they were distressingly vague as to how they had managed it or at what port, or country even, they had arrived. Some ingenious and original organiser had housed the Cairo herd in the Agricultural Hall. Each stall, intended for prize cow or Arab stallion, held a group of men or women or an entire family. The building was immense and—for Egypt in May—cool. It was designed for the tidy distribution of rations and medicaments, whether by stud grooms or by the Army, and water was laid on in every stall. The sanitary arrangements, though quite satisfactory for animals and the smaller refugees, were all that had to be improvised.

To sort out this mass by preliminary interrogation into individuals with a name and a past was my job. It went on for a fortnight in which the shortest day was twelve hours. I had the loan of Greek-speakers from the Field Security depot, and I myself worked through relays of interpreters chosen from such Greek soldiers and police as were obviously reliable and spoke one of my languages. I could understand enough Greek to appreciate the main points of a story and to ask a very simple question, but no more.

Hardest to bear were the well-meaning efforts of British business and diplomatic wives, determined to be angels of mercy and always making pets of the more plausible and doubtful characters. But that is one of the curses laid upon security officers; I had already experienced it in Athens where my efforts to prevent society women whom I knew to be pro-German from visiting British hospitals and soldiers' clubs were pilloried as narrow-minded. I have no doubt that in a time of emergency and among any cultured and merciful people security must give way to charity; but one should also put a penny in the box for the security officer who will not forgive himself nor be forgiven if the enemy agent slips through too easily.

That done, I was invited to run a Greek bureau in

Security Intelligence Middle East. I did not feel, however, that I had charged into this fascinating life in order to sit in an office and file the political aberrations of Greeks. I wanted to be out and about again with a section. My choice, from the point of view of military ambition, was foolish. But I was determined to enjoy my war in my own way.

Robin Wordsworth offered me the Jerusalem section, which was a little uncertain what it was doing or why it was supposed to be doing it. When I had been in the Holy City a couple of weeks I was uncertain too. I (b) was unique for jealous stupidity. If I wanted information from headquarters files, I could only get it by persistence. The alternative was to get it from Palestine Police—if one did not mind being suspected of intending to sell it to Jew or Arab.

But certainly the section had not created confidence around itself, and was not to be compared with my brilliant Greek section. It was one of the first to be formed and contained too many ex-regulars who had transferred to Field Security at a time when we were ready to accept anyone with a trustworthy record but few other qualifications; and it was influenced by the military police, who always judged a man's keenness on his ability to 'bring cases.' There was, however, one compensation: the best sergeant-major I ever had. He had been a Lincolnshire gamekeeper, and only wanted an employer who knew his own mind. That section, when we had trimmed it to shape, began to resemble in tone some remote English village. It was cunning rather than intelligent, cynical, outrageously cheerful at parties or under stress, and rich with hidden tenderness in unexpected places.

Meanwhile, expecting a long stay in Jerusalem, I made

myself comfortable. A Field Security Officer, unless with a formation, was not obliged or encouraged to live in a mess. It was a preposterous ruling, founded on the idea that he might be called upon to investigate the indiscretions of a brother officer. If he ever did, the mess and the brother officer would have been the last persons to know anything about it. But of course we fostered the delusion for all it was worth, since it allowed us to live on a civilian standard. A safe rule for the traveller was to choose the hotel where the Field Security Officer stayed. It was sure to be cheap and to have food which, however exotic to British tastes, was highly edible.

I quickly discovered that Jerusalem hotels, with the exception of the too expensive King David, were dull. Those with Jewish proprietors were too redolent of Central Europe. Those with Arab proprietors ran to hot sweet puddings, suet and other delights of the colonial service. There was nothing for it but to take a flat, and so, answering an advertisement, I fell in with a delightful person of about my own age who had come as a child from Poland to Palestine, studied philosophy under Croce in Italy and spoke the only Hebrew I ever heard which was not harsh to the ear. Haim Wardi had converted an old Arab stable into a cool one-room house, packed with books. At the bottom of his garden was a much smaller one-room house. This I took, and furnished it with the barest necessities, painted grey, and two Bokhara rugs. It successfully combined military and aesthetic severity.

But it was not the time for this personal armistice. Truer fulfilment, considering my environment and its opportunities, was to exercise such powers of creation as I had in wide human relationships rather than in a miniature setting for them. And I was swiftly hurled into a position where harmony had to be made from the raw materials of hatred and malice, without even a little decent human

envy to lighten the mixture. I was ordered to Beirut to take over the security of the docks during the evacuation of the Vichy troops.

They were the Army of the Levant in which we had placed all our hopes during the early Roumanian days. Disillusioned, sullen and isolated from home, they accepted the defeat of France and obeyed the Vichy government of Pétain which was still administering the mandated territories of Syria and the Lebanon. Relations with the British were correct and, on the Palestine frontier, by no means cold. Middle East Command, already engaged to the last man and vehicle in the desert, Abyssinia and Greece, had no wish whatever for added trouble in Syria.

When, however, Rashid Ali's revolt of May 1941 broke out in Iraq, he was assisted by German aircraft. Dentz, the French commander-in-chief, permitted the refuelling of the aircraft in Syria and even supplied the rebels with French arms. This was a most dangerous threat to the garrison of the Middle East, then, though we did not feel it, a besieged army, for it could turn our whole position and cut off the vital Iraqi oil supplies as well.

The intentions of the enemy were obvious, and there was nothing for it but to occupy Syria and the Lebanon before he did. Operations began on June 9, 1941. Fighting was hard and for the first week or two critical, but the common tradition of military politeness—chivalry is too delicate a word for modern weapons—was on the whole preserved, since aggressors and defenders understood each others' motives. The campaign ended with the armistice of July 14, under the terms of which we agreed to repatriate the Vichy troops by sea to France with the honours of war. That trumpet phrase of heraldry meant in practice that every officer and man should march on board with his personal arms. Also I think—for words are still magic—it enforced an eighteenth-century standard of

courtesy upon the victors and preserved the pride of the gallantly defeated.

But ease was bedevilled by the Free French, though not for a moment can they be blamed. They insisted that the mandated territories were not ours to occupy, and were quite unimpressed by our offer of independence for Syria and a qualified independence for the Lebanon. De Gaulle did not so much distrust our intentions as our ability, in the stress of war and the confusion of peace, ever to carry them out. He was, of course, right. Even assuming that we had held the territories in trust and formally returned them to France after the war, the Arabs themselves, as later they did, would have demanded an end to foreign tutelage. If French influence was to survive at all, French participation in the campaign and the continuity of French administration were essential.

The intervention of de Gaulle and his handful of fanatical gallants might reasonably have been expected to limit the fighting and to make surrender more palatable for the Army of the Levant. It did not. It poisoned all negotiations with the bitterness of civil war. The Free French needed both troops and administrators. They therefore demanded and obtained the right to canvass the defeated Vichy army, coercing every officer and man to opt for repatriation or enlistment under the cross of de Gaulle with no alternative. They obtained only five thousand out of thirty-seven thousand. Humiliated by failure, they tried every trick of Gaullist intransigence to delay the embarkation. Each side accused the other of betraying France. Both appealed to the British for protection.

That was the position when I arrived in Beirut at the beginning of August. The Free French prowled around the Vichy camps in some danger of their lives. The Lebanese fawned upon the British, swearing that they desired nothing

so much as to become a colony of Empire—a most transparent lie, for if, in spite of their tastes, they did not like the French they would have been bored to the point of rebellion by the Anglo-Saxon. In the St Georges Hotel, with its sun-umbrellaed terrace overlooking the Mediterranean, its balconies and its cool restaurant, life remained obstinately fixed at 1939. Families of the wealthier French officers discussed packing. Christian Arabs bought and sold the futures of commodities which did not exist, and discussed the peculiarities of British officers who were too blind to see a bribe when delicately offered. Intelligence captains and majors conferred in corners, with half an eye upon the exotic mistresses of the French army and colonial service, restless, poor lovely darlings, with the problem of whether they should transfer their affections to Free French, who were as moneyless as monks and a lot more honest, or sail to unknown severities in France.

High on Lebanon the brigadiers and colonels of the Armistice Control Commission exhausted their energy in preventing furious disputes on the merits of Pétain and de Gaulle, and somehow found a little more to arrange the transference of administration and the order in which the troops should embark. Under the olive trees of the coastal hills was the ultimate arbiter, the Australian Corps, behaving very well under the formidable impact of Lebanese araq and intensely disappointed to find that the village maidens, often of startling beauty, were just as unsatisfactory as the Greeks. Meanwhile the liners, by courtesy of the British and German Admiralties, had started from Marseilles.

Fortunately our commander was that patient military diplomat, General Wilson, now Field-Marshal Lord Wilson of Libya. His executive instrument was the Control Commission. Among the committees responsible to the Control

Commission was the Embarkation Committee, upon which I represented the interests of security.

The chairman was Colonel Robinson. Those perfect military manners which I had, trembling, appreciated in Athens now paid a dividend. He understood French well, and spoke it with that touch of hesitation and those delightfully English constructions which always engage the affections of Frenchmen. There were two majors from A and Q branches of the Vichy staff, who quickly warmed to our friendly intentions. There was a Free French captain whose orders were obviously to protest at anything and everything. On our own side were representatives of Movement Control and of the Navy. The Vichy navy was represented by a lieutenant-commander who was frigid and correct until he was allowed—in private—to say what he thought of our attack on the French fleet at Mers el Kebir. Discovering that we had no strong opinions, for or against, he became almost human and would even drink with the hated British, assuring us in the most friendly manner that the Germans were even more detestable.

The main duties of security were three: to ensure that no unauthorised person went on board the ships or disembarked from them, since every convoy provided a heaven-sent chance for the enemy to communicate with agents and sympathisers: to inspect personal kit for valuables and papers during the embarkation parade of the troops: to make a thorough customs examination of the main baggage. For these duties I had an Australian guard company, one and sometimes two Australian Field Security sections and Oswald Ormsby's magnificent section—most of whom had commissions within a year—which had arrived from England two months before. Most important of all, I had that dream of a security officer, a free hand—provided of course that I did not create or look

like creating any international incident which the Control Commission could not settle.

The first convoy arrived; and the quays of Beirut, empty except for the grey, reptilian urgency of the Navy, were suddenly gay with Europe. The very names of the liners, drawn from the fleets of the Cie. Transatlantique and Messageries Maritimes, were a reminder that peaceful harbours still existed, though for many years yet neither they nor we would be released to visit them.

On every gangway were armed guards, with orders to allow no one on or off the ships who did not present my handwritten pass stating the name and rank of the person. The passes were squares of coloured cardboard, and what the colour of the day would be depended on my random choice among the sheets bought from a stationery shop. It looked an unbreakable system—always remembering that the weak point of any system of passes is the guard.

The Australians were ideal. By birthright and taste they were no respecters of persons, and I reinforced the national humour by giving them specimen passes with ranks of brigadier upwards and with names and initials—if you looked at them closely—of pungent indecency. There was no bluffing them. They would not have allowed General Wilson himself on board without my pass.

But the perfect system was of course immediately disorganised by the unforeseen. Although the Vichy troops could not be induced to join the Free French, the crews of the liners were only too willing. When forced back up the gangways, they either jumped into the sea or swarmed down the mooring cables or carried refuse on shore and refused to return.

There was little chance of evading the strong force of guards on well-lit quays, or the patrol boats in the harbour. At least I have always hoped so. But even if we arrested every deserter, the position was impossible. Without their

proper complement of engineers and electricians the ships could not be sailed back to Marseilles—as the Free French were happily aware. And our sentries were becoming muddled and uncertain; for, if you qualify a sentry's orders by too many exceptions, he is inclined to treat his duty as a boring ceremonial and to be of no more worldly use than a bayonet outside Buckingham Palace.

We appealed to the Control Commission. So, with fury and an unanswerable case, did the Free French. The judgement was deliciously British. On no account was anyone to be permitted to leave the ships. But, if they did, they were to be arrested and handed over to the Free French, who on their part were not to harangue, encourage or assist deserters but to be truly thankful for what God and the security officer might give them.

In practice I translated this to mean: (*a*) that any Free French officer hanging about the ships should be imperceptibly drawn off to a harbour café to talk about de Gaulle; (*b*) that deserters, if still on the gangway or preparing to jump, should be deterred by the utmost Australian ferocity; (*c*) that if a deserter actually had both feet on the quay, he was to be escorted to the guardroom.

The orders worked. A sentry with a good breakfast in his belly would stretch them a bit; another who happened to be feeling anti-French, Free or not, would work to rule. And the guardroom was usually occupied by half a dozen outrageously cheerful deserters awaiting interrogation by their compatriots.

Free French security appeared, to our minds, eccentric. If the man rallying to de Gaulle were a Catholic and interrogated by a Catholic, he was passed at once; he was also all right if he were an anti-clerical socialist, and happened to be interrogated by an anti-clerical socialist. But if his luck were out, and he got an interrogator from the wrong party, he was held in custody for further and

prolonged examination. My own interrogations—which I only undertook if a man looked of interest to other branches of Intelligence—usually ended in too much boisterous goodwill all round, and assurances that if there were any pro-Boche about his companions would unearth him sooner than I. In their case that was probably true. Groups of the homeless, however, are inclined to whisper to the security officer against the silent, the eccentric or the contemptuous, and to accept the plausible, talkative rogue.

During the three or four days between the arrival of the ships and their departure the Field Security sections had to turn themselves into customs officers. The French were allowed to take home their used furniture and household goods. This meant that married officers and administrators, who might have served for many years in Syria, had each of them enough beautifully-made and nailed crates to fill a removal van. The export of gold, of new goods, of documents and of food was forbidden. Our problem was to guess if any of these were hidden in the cavernous recesses of the crates.

It was manifestly impossible; so would it have been for real customs officers. But we were most of us travellers, and knew their procedure and their limitations. Like them, we wanted to send off our thirty-two thousand speaking well of the good nature of the British; like them, we had to find scapegoats so that army wife would whisper to army wife, before they packed, of the appalling indignities suffered by poor Mme Telle, and how Colonel Chose, who had bought so much beautiful embroidered bed linen had been forced to take it all back to the shop and sell it for what they would give.

The customs officer has no real defence against the non-professional smuggler but the informant. Nor had we. Being Arabs, our informants were more often actuated by malice than a sense of duty; they tended to accuse police

and officials whom they did not like of smuggling out the Lebanese gold reserve hidden in upholstery. By God and His Glory, we had only to rip it all up and we should see! Ormsby's section, which was normally stationed in Beirut and gathered the information, grew brilliant at sifting the true from the false. Their chief source was the shopkeeper who knew very well that the passengers were not allowed to buy household goods for shipment to France and promptly reported any purchase. If we had no information whatever and still had to make an example of somebody, we naturally chose the difficult, the protesting or the evasive—who had to suffer the disappearance of the military into their crates, the exposure upon the dock of the open wardrobes and the dining-room suite, and the long wait for a carpenter with a hammer and nails.

Dock concrete blazed in the sub-tropical sun, and the sparkle of the sea, promising blue cold of diamonds, deceptively added still more heat from its tepid upper layer. The Field Security N.C.Os, their shirts and shorts dark brown with sweat, worked in groups of three—always containing one fluent French-speaker—questioning, chalking and occasionally opening. They never lost cheerfulness, and seemed to impress upon the French themselves that this was a sort of relentless, top-speed game. I can remember despair among the voyagers and irony and such half-humorous language as any soldier might in the circumstances be expected to use, but little real resentment or bitterness. We in the customs sheds could afford to be merciful, knowing ourselves to be chiefly a deterrent. The true work of detection was being done outside the port by a sinister-looking sergeant of Ormsby's section who had already familiarised himself with a fair cross-section of the good and bad characters of the waterfront.

The day of embarkation was more formal. Sam Brownes shone and webbing was blanched, for we were to impose

ourselves upon the French army in parade order. The battalions which had at last, in spite of all Free French obstruction, obtained their embarkation orders marched to the *place d'armes* on the east of the docks, and lined up in column of companies for inspection. Our men went slowly along the ranks, asking a question here and searching a kitbag there. I doubt if we ever confiscated anything. Fresh from the opulent crates of staff and administration we were in socialist mood when it came to discovering a cheese or a present of cheap jewellery in the poor haversacks of other ranks.

The troops were allowed the personal arms proper to their ranks, and nothing more. On one occasion, with doubtful legality, I ordered tommy-guns to be surrendered. The French lieutenant-colonel protested that his establishment was one sub-machine-gun to a platoon, and that its bearer carried no rifle. When I pointed out that the Middle East was very short of tommy-guns and that we could use them on Germans whereas he could not, he very sportingly gave way. But I had to assure him that the British, not the Free French, would be armed with them. Which in fact did get them I do not know, but four were acquired by the sections as cherished possessions, covered by the completely worthless but unchallengeable authority of the Embarkation Committee.

Nothing else, being moderate men, did we spirit away except much-wanted .45 ammunition and two cars. The ammo. was very necessary, for the Army, though it had provided us with revolvers, refused us more than twelve rounds per man. Thereafter the Syrian and Palestine sections could really learn to shoot and challenged each other to matches, losing section to order and pay for dinner in the back room of whatever grubby and efficient restaurant they patronised.

The history of the two cars is a cautionary tale for young

officers who should always be careful that their winnings are covered by paper, preferably issued by a unit about to depart for some other theatre of war.

Our friends on the Vichy embarkation staff, who left last of all, were reluctant to surrender their staff cars to the Free French and told us in what street they had parked them. Ormsby, who was deep in plain-clothes work, needed a civilian car as well as his section truck. As for me, I had not even a truck, having been issued with a horrible little toy Italian car, captured in the desert. So we helped ourselves—he to a discreet black Citroën, I to a powerful Ford open tourer.

For months we used our cars without a care, but meanwhile the Free French, instead of attending to their internal politics, were ferreting out the fate of all the vehicles which should have been theirs and were not. A mild enquiry from Ninth Army, interested though obviously bored by nonsensical claims, was a warning that we should hear more of the matter. For me, instant action was easy. A friendly Australian R.A.S.C. company maintained my vehicles. I had no trouble in persuading its commanding officer to condemn my Italian horror and formally to issue the Ford in replacement. Thereafter I could look any military policeman in the eye. But Ormsby went for months in terror of court martial with the Citroën hidden under a cover in the section yard. Being a man of honour, he could not sell it; and he could not either lose it or drive it into the sea in case possession was ever incontrovertibly traced to him. In the end that car demanded the joint efforts of Robin Wordsworth, the adjutant and the most secret offices of the Middle East before it would consent to vanish into the anonymous mass of British Army vehicles.

When the parade was over and the troops were filing on board, we reverted from soldiers to customs officers and lined up behind the long counter in the customs shed to

deal with the hand baggage of the families. The export of personal jewellery was of course permitted, but ladies who festooned themselves like African queens with heavy gold bracelets were in trouble; so were those who tried to assure a hasty and indiscriminate chalking of their baggage by rubbing themselves, spiritually or in fact, against the weary masculinity of the most sophisticated corps in the British Army. But the woman who was charming, cultured, helpless, assuming at once that she must put us at ease in our embarrassing duty, beat us as completely as she beats professionals. She floated deliciously on board, escorted by a chivalrous sergeant—if the officers were too busy—and there no doubt unpacked with an air of triumph and laid upon the bunk, which waited to enclose within its blushing teak such cool good manners, her insignificant contraband.

Between convoys there were a few free days when the sections could put back some of the weight which they had sweated off on the docks, and I, apart from sittings of the Embarkation Committee, could idle in the luxury of the St Georges Hotel. Then the rush would begin again, starting with the despair of the Vichy staff because all their plans for the movement of troops from outlying stations to Beirut had been demolished by the demands of the Free French for last-minute changes. Every day I was in the offices of the majors of A and Q branch, and mutual commiseration led to friendship—a melancholy and almost emotional friendship in which we wished to heaven that our easy collaboration was for a more martial purpose. Neither of them ever suspected that I was not a regular, and when at a final lunch I told them with what an amateur they had really dealt, their surprise was a most flattering compliment to my anthropoid capacity for imitating the actions of a different species.

On the second convoy we sent off a battalion of the Foreign Legion—magnificent troops with a tendency to

grow cinematic beards. When our respectful inspection of their kit was over, the commanding officer, formally and by his adjutant, requested me to report to him. He returned my salute with a glorious French flick of the wrist. We were instantly and obviously transported to the valiant and not wholly juvenile world of the Honours of War. He told me that I was the last British officer he would see, and this was the last chance he would have. He gave me his word that at his order the whole battalion would march off the *place d'armes* and join the British. But Free French they would not be.

It went to my heart to reply that his offer could not be accepted. The question had arisen a dozen times before, both in the camps and at the final parade. For once our orders were precise. Either the troops sailed for France or they accepted the Cross of Lorraine. The hatred between the two parties of the French was pathological. Vichy could not forgive the Free French for having made their right and gallant sacrifice; and the Free French themselves made reunion so much more difficult than it need have been. In those early Syrian days they were touchy, narrow and unsure of themselves. Among all the historical virtues of France the only one they fully represented was her superb courage.

The Foreign Legion sloped arms and marched off by companies to the dock gates, where they stood easy while the column ahead of them moved forward yard by yard before breaking up into queues for the gangways. I was suddenly hurled into the position of the lonely and dutiful representative of power on the second page of a Kipling short story—which ended, since the craftsman is bound by laws less merciful than life, in knock-about farce.

A crowd of some twenty or thirty Free French marines gathered at the dock gates yelling insults. The Legion began to growl and to return them. I advised the marines

to disperse in what I hoped was the true French manner, genial, weary and authoritative. But they could not know that I had any authority; for them I was merely a stray British officer interfering with their fun. I tried an order. They slunk back ten yards and shouted a little louder than before. The men of the Legion instead of staring ahead along the line of the column turned to face the marines.

Roaring up the docks on a motor-cycle, I grabbed Ormsby's truck and driver and half a dozen tough Australians from the guardroom. The marines still seemed to believe that I was an unaccountable spoil-sport. There was nothing left but to arrest the ringleaders and cart them off to their barracks under guard. I was just about to climb into the truck, congratulating myself that an *incident grave*, likely to involve the Control Commission in an endless exchange of signals with London, had been prevented, when one of the Australians loosed off his pistol and shot a Free French marine through both cheeks. As he had his mouth loudly open at the time he lost no teeth.

Ormsby's driver was in civil life an undertaker's assistant. Though accustomed to death, he preferred it in more respectful surroundings than those provided by the Foreign Legion, Australians, Free French Marines and me. The bullet after traversing those surprised and indignant cheeks continued through the canvas of the truck and the wind-screen. The driver's peacetime training reinforced his panic. Having, as he supposed, a corpse in the back, he proposed to remove it. He trod on the accelerator, and I found myself shouting vainly after a cloud of dust.

I could already hear the accusations. Not content with threatening gallant allies and shooting them down in droves, I had lost control of the situation and given no orders for the disposal of the prisoners and the care of the wounded. I despatched motor-cyclists to all likely spots. I rang up the hospitals. I alerted the military police. No

good. The truck had vanished into the shimmering air of the Levant. It was, or seemed to me hours before even Field Security could bring me news of it.

The undertaker's assistant had driven madly for open country. The Australians and the marines, assuming that he was carrying out orders unknown to them, sat peaceably in the back. They had patched up the cheeks with field dressings and were now on excellent terms with each other.

After a while the driver, meeting neither cemetery nor sudden death, shamefacedly stopped by the side of the road. The guard, joyously discovering the improbable situation, tackled it with Australian versatility. They turned the marines loose in town, took the casualty to hospital, sent the driver and truck back to his billet and then very reasonably enjoyed the opportunity for a slow and pleasant stroll back to the docks through the August evening.

Of course there was a Court of Enquiry to satisfy the Free French howl for British blood, preferably mine. Ormsby's driver—sportsman that he was—told the Court exactly what had happened and reduced them to unjudicial chuckles. The Australian guard commander swore that his man who fired the unnecessary shot had only recently left the hands of the Corps psychiatrist and had now been returned to him for further adjustment. I played Kipling for all he was worth, and explained in terse phrases, dragged unwillingly from the strong, silent man, what would have happened if the Foreign Legion had drawn those bayonets which the Honours of War permitted them to carry. The evidence, though quite unrehearsed, built up to an effective climax. I was not only cleared, but even congratulated.

When the time came for the last convoy, orders and counter-orders rained upon Beirut from the mountains.

The Vichy government were attempting to avoid their obligation to return the few British prisoners-of-war from Salonica; as a reprisal General Dentz and some of his officers were transferred to Jerusalem under open arrest. Another storm blew up when the Free French insisted on retaining in Syria certain key administrators of the colonial service, whether or not they rallied to de Gaulle.

On the Embarkation Committee, however, and at the docks collaboration had grown into a model for NATO. The Vichy staff were friendly and regretful. The Free French, affected by the finality of the parting, had recovered some of that national flexibility which hitherto they had been afraid to use. I myself ascribed the better understanding to Colonel Koenig (later the French commander in the magnificent action of Bir Hachim and G.O.C. in French-occupied Germany) on the worthless evidence—yet the only evidence which is ever attainable by a junior officer—that he commanded my respect and that he would listen.

The Australians had been ordered to give the last of the French troops the military adieu proper to the Honours of War. Nobody had considered the ceremonial possibilities of Field Security, for which I cannot altogether blame them. But we wanted to say good-bye more than anyone else, and—having little of it in our daily life—we enjoyed good theatre. There was going to be a space to the left of the line. Since it was certain that no one would ever question our presence so long as we did the job properly, I decided that F.S. should fill it.

Ormsby, fresh out from England, at least knew what a section should look like when formally paraded with its motor-cycles. From an ex-cavalry officer I obtained the details of an imposing manœuvre which would enable the four sections to roar up the docks in third gear and peel off to the left into a double line on the narrow quay.

It came off smartly, and we were still as guardsmen—though soaked with the sweat, dust and straw of the customs—when the great, gay ships began to move and the crash of the Australians presenting arms pointed a moment of utter silence before the band swept into the *Marseillaise*. I remember standing at the salute, facing the widening gap of sea, with tears paying no honours at all to the primitive immobility of my face. I am always inclined to swallow when I hear on any solemn occasion that most glorious of national anthems. But this was good-bye. All of me, the foolish and frustrated boy of 1914–1918, the passionate lover of Europe, even the writer for whom the clarity of the French sentence was sacred, said good-bye for years which I then believed would double that first war to the beloved nation.

In September 1941 I returned to Jerusalem and my deserted section, which had been carrying on, sound and stolid, under the sergeant-major. They were elated over the capture of a dangerous character whom they had cast, somewhat irregularly, into the military clink. He was a recruit in one of the newly formed Jewish companies who possessed in his kit private weapons which had not been issued to him by any quartermaster or even an Embarkation Committee. Visiting him in his unhappy cell, I saw that he was not at all the type of Jewish revolutionary who collected illegal arms in order to use them on the British as a scapegoat for Hitler. He really did want to kill Germans, and thought very reasonably that a fearsome dagger and an obsolete pistol would be of assistance; it was evident, in fact, that, like his interrogator, he was a harmless romanticist. I had to disillusion the section as tactfully as I could. Sections were always over-keen when officerless, for the staff seldom knew how to handle them. Quite half the art

of the Field Security Officer was to prevent his men from rushing off after rabbits without spoiling their enthusiasm for the hunt.

It was now that Ninth Army was formed, under General Wilson, to take over the task of forming a defensive front in Syria in case the enemy attacked through Turkey. Headquarters moved up to Brumana, a lovely village strung along the top of the coastal range 2,500 feet above Beirut, with High Lebanon behind. We went with them, as the Ninth Army section, and settled down to a dull round of pure military security, the chief object of which was to ensure headquarters against any such raid as our commandos had just carried out on Rommel. Lighter relief was the investigation of innumerable monks and their cellars, of one Roumanian cabaret girl all violets and fur coat, of the feudal factions of the Lebanese, mutually libellous, and a charming little Greco-Phoenician temple. I myself, putting forward the accepted myth that I ought not to live in a mess, luxuriated once more at the Hotel St Georges and travelled back and forth over the mountain roads by motor-cycle.

I had possessed and quickly smashed one of these enthralling vehicles in my teens. In Jerusalem I learned, or half learned, under the anxious care of the sergeant-major, to ride one again. Indeed I rode it, rejoicing and absent-minded, all the way to Beirut when I went up to take over the security of the embarkation. Oswald Ormsby's section was then billeted in a house off a steep flight of steps which ran down from the square towards the port. By some astonishing misjudgment of clutch or acceleration I found myself careering down these steps, and stopped in front of the billet trying to look as if I had done it on purpose. That marvellous section was prejudiced in my favour ever after—not that they were taken in for a

moment, but they appreciated a sense of style even in suicide.

On these daily trips to and from Brumana I came to no great harm but once, when a combination of ice and the mayor's brandy caused me to run over my own thumb. I do not know how I did this, for the motor-bike and I parted company without any noticeable period of mutual entanglement. But my casual confidence makes me shudder. For more than a year the roads, the lanes and even the goat tracks of Lebanon and Palestine were for me delight and recreation. My N.C.Os, who lived on their motor-cycles and would no more walk than a cattleman, occasionally ventured a restraining word. They were right. Many sections, including my own, had a man killed, and there was hardly a winter month when none was in hospital. The cause of the casualties was nearly always the same—a military or civilian truck turning left without mirror or hand signal just when the motor-cyclist was committed to overtake.

Ninth Army was only an immensely important skeleton which could, at need, be instantly clothed with troops. It was based on Arab country, friendly but incalculable, yet it was not responsible for administration or internal security; those were the duties of the small, devoted but jealous band of the Free French who, if they had a near revolt on their hands, could be implicitly trusted to keep all news of it from the British and, when that was no longer possible, to believe illogically that we had instigated it. Not only was there danger of a pro-German movement, but agents could slip over from neutral Turkey across the five hundred miles of wild frontier to support any Fifth Column.

Added to these difficulties was the potentially explosive problem of feeding Syria and the Lebanon. The Arab capitalist, Christian or Moslem, is even more immoral than

a novelist's exaggeration of the nineteenth-century American. Profit in his mind is a conception completely isolated from its effects, and a speculator who has cornered wheat can piously give charity to starving children without any sense at all of his own guilt. It was the task of the British politely to conceal their opinions and, by a combination of wheat imports and fines, to force the cornered stocks on to the market.

Either General Wilson or his able son, Patrick, who stretched long legs with deceptive casualness in the I (b) office, perceived that in Field Security the Army had a reliable organisation to hand which could watch and warn. Never had we been employed in quite such a role, nor had such appreciative masters.

Field Security was then at its flowering. In early days, still feeling for its responsibilities, it concentrated on the elementary duties of security police; in the later days of the occupation of enemy territory, temptation and the delusion of self-importance were sometimes too great for common flesh. But in the years between 1941 and 1944 the Field Security Wing in the Middle East preserved a standard of common sense, discretion, tirelessness and gaiety which made me proud to belong to it. Partly this was Robin Wordsworth's doing; partly it was due to the extraordinary quality of the four sections which arrived from England in the spring of 1941.

There were sections at Beirut and Damascus; at Quneitra among the Druse; across the desert at Deir ez Zor on the Euphrates; in the Duck's Bill of Syria where the frontiers of Iraq, Turkey and Syria meet and the mountains of Persia are in sight on a clear day. Most vital of all was the Aleppo section whose men, speaking every language of the Levant, rode the trains of the Baghdad Railway which so closely followed the frontier that a passenger jumping from the left-hand window would land

in Turkey, and from the right-hand in Syria. All the sections had outlying detachments in the chief villages of their district: sometimes a pair, sometimes a man alone, living on the local food and drink, sleeping in a white-washed village room on his blankets—if the section had never managed to win some camp beds—and spending his days listening to the village notables or smoothing relations between the civilian population and some unit which considered itself lonely.

De Gaulle in his memoirs writes bitterly of the British agents all over the country, and I presume that, partly, he means us. But we were never anti-French, nor did we ever give advice to the administered against the interests of the administration. We were probably annoying in that it was difficult to keep anything secret from us. One has only to imagine the position reversed—a French Army in, say, the pre-war Sudan, doubtful whether the hard-worked remnants of a British colonial service could ensure its security, and determined that no sudden development should take it by surprise. We conceived ourselves as a modest, necessary oil, permeating everywhere it is true, but helping the cogs of Arab, French and British to interlock as smoothly as possible and thus to relieve the fighting troops of all distractions from their proper business.

My own part in all this was wretchedly small, but I had had more than my fair share of opportunities already. We were moved down from Brumana to Tripoli to look after the security of Ninth Australian Division. There was very little of the more interesting civil security, for the French team in Tripoli was efficient.

On one journey to Latakia I met God. He was sitting in the hotel restaurant wearing a bright brown lounge suit and drinking brandy like any other man. He was also extremely courteous in, as one would expect, the divine language of France, and did not press upon me the First

Commandment. He was then giving us a great deal of trouble, for, while we impiously doubted his identity, his own clan did not. It was a country as rich in religions as in Roman days. There were Moslem heretics with fascinating rites of their own: the Alaouites with their priest-king and his sacred wives, the Yezidis who were polite to the devil in the Jebel Sinjar, the Druses whose covens, for most of the year, were respectable as Scottish elders. There were the happy and urbane Bahai, and a few Zoroastrians. And there were four different kinds of native Christians, excluding the sects produced by competitive missionaries ranging in time from St James to the Methodists. God was on a very good wicket from the start.

Even he had to put up with a lone Field Security sergeant at his elbow, and his tendency to Old Testament ferocity eventually led to his arrest. All his doings were devoutly chronicled in a résumé of the Field Security weekly reports compiled and circulated by Patrick Wilson for the delectation of Intelligence in general. There was no principle in it readily explicable to a magazine editor. Generally speaking, to merit publication an action or event had to be utterly incredible to a peacetime public and instantly and obviously true to us.

Life in Tripoli was made for me pleasantly exotic by the friendship of Fouad Douaihy, a local Christian landowner and head of a small Lebanese clan which gave him the right to the title of Sheikh. He claimed descent from Crusaders, and looked, I imagine, much as his stocky, florid, moustachioed ancestors when, after the fall of Tripoli, they assumed the turban—Sheikh Fouad, like other well-to-do Lebanese Christians, always wore an expensive red tarboosh—and made their peace with the surrounding Moslems.

His winter residence was Zghorta where he carried on the life of the Great Hall, surrounded by relatives and

retainers. The Hall was in fact no bigger than a good suburban living-room, but his manner extended it through history. When he spoke Arabic you could see that he was the traditional protector of his clan, by steel or bribery, against the Turkish pashas. When he spoke French—with a bookish correctitude, for he had been educated in France—his spiritual home was obviously the Second Empire.

Such a personage was much to my taste, but what attracted him to me I do not know. It may have been that I introduced him to the Indian Mule Company whose lines were on his domain; thereafter he delighted to sit in their officers' mess tent and talk horses; or possibly it was my delight in Lebanese wines and cooking, of which he was rightly proud. He even compelled me to acquire a liking for araq, which in Lebanon was made from grapes and much resembled Italian grappa with an added flavour of aniseed.

His men, his table and his advice were mine to command at any moment. I hoped for further feudal privileges; but, though a lusty bachelor of sixty, he appeared to enjoy none himself. Whatever his tastes were, they were never mentioned or even hinted at. Some of his female relatives were very pretty indeed; and after one admirable dinner, at which I had paid marked attention to a young Douaihy who was deliciously pretending to be flirtatious and French, I was surprised by the sudden flowering of an incident straight out of the *Arabian Nights*.

One of Fouad's dusty clansmen, whom I knew only by sight, appeared in my office with a secret to impart. When the doors were shut and I had sworn by God that I would never breathe a word to the Sheikh of what he was about to tell me, he took from his sash and offered me a scented note in ill-spelt French—but it was no moment for orthography—which whispered shyly that my charms at the

dinner had overcome all virginal resistance and that supper would be laid for me, if I cared to partake of it, at a certain address at eleven at night. Yes, said the Arab boldly, it was indeed she whom I had met and whom my heart desired.

I did not think that my attack, limited as it was by the nineteenth-century conventions of that dinner party, could have been quite so overwhelming, and the note seemed a little out of character. So when the evening came, though I hoped for the best, I slipped a pistol into my pocket and told the sergeant-major where I would be.

At some distance from the rendezvous I dismissed the civilian taxi which I had discreetly hired, and moved cautiously through the back lanes of the sleeping village. I opened the door I had been told to open and shut it quietly behind me. There indeed was the supper laid out, but my hostess was not the slender, doe-eyed girl with water-melon hips. It was Fouad's cousin—a melancholy, excitable and rather dirty maiden lady in her middle fifties.

I look back with shame upon the ensuing half hour. All chivalry, all the European traditions of the gentleman, even the Christian behest of duty to one's neighbour commanded a single course of action. Taste and the decadent fastidiousness of the twentieth century commanded quite another. How I escaped from that house with manners I cannot remember. The answer is probably that I escaped without any. I returned in the dead of night to Tripoli, sweating with panic as if I had been delivered from that unlikely ambush which I half suspected.

Our military duties would have been intolerably dull if we had not been the only British unit in the division. That meant a fresh and appreciative audience for our lectures, and unfamiliar difficulties to settle in the relations between troops and civilians. The staff was kind, though

touchy at the merest hint of human imperfection, and the troops looked upon us as a mysterious body of men of immense sophistication, fully able to deal with any beautiful spy according to her deserts and attractions.

With the military police, all of them over six feet and the most formidable bunch of sympathetic thugs I have ever met, co-operation was wonderful. On one occasion I was called up by the D.A.P.M., himself capable of disciplining with one hand, should it be necessary, any three of his policemen, in a state of abject terror and embarrassment. They had picked up a sort of human being in a raid on the local brothel—an appalling joint run by the French for their native troops—and would I come round at once and tell them what it was?

I entered the guardroom. Half a dozen vast Australians were standing round a curious object, as nervous as women observing a giant cockroach. It was small, wizened, blankly self-possessed and attired in shirt and trousers and a filthy velvet jacket. They had thought it might be a deserter, but now, said the D.A.P.M., his voice rising to a scream, they were not sure whether it was male or female.

My courage thus challenged, I could only touch and find out. It was female. Gentle interrogation proved that it lived in the dark back closet where it was found. This seemed to be entirely a question for the French liaison officer, but I persisted. Was she an employee of the place? No, she was a friend of Madame. Then was she at liberty to come and go? Certainly, but she was quite happy and did not. She was—didn't I understand?—*the* friend of Madame. At last I saw the light, and tried to explain to the Australians. They were extremely shocked.

Soon afterwards all the Australians left for the Pacific fronts, and the Middle East was never quite so full-flavoured again. It occurred to me years later—for the simpler the fact, the longer I am liable to take to see it—

that I might have been condemned to heavy military security because I had already proved that I could get on with them. I was always surprised by the mutual liking, since my acceptance of the world as it is makes me impatient with the enthusiasms of Anglo-Saxons across an ocean, and I can relax more completely in the company of European man or woman. But in war that is unimportant. When men are trying to do their best with a simple environment, the 'best' is so obvious that there is no room for any difference of opinion as to what the word means.

Here, too, that Spanish background may have counted. I remember once being hailed, late at night and in a deserted street of Tripoli, by two large and aggressive Australians who insisted that I should drink from the bottle of gin which they were waving. Any sensible pommy officer would have vanished round the nearest corner; others, more military than tolerant, might have endeavoured to arrest the pair. But all they wished was to enforce out of season a muddled conception of democracy, and they were enchanted when I pretended to take a cordial pull at their bottle and after some conversation set them on their way to camp. They swore that none of their own officers would have done any such thing. I doubt that—but courtesy is always easier for the outsider, especially if it be after dinner.

Soon after Christmas I took a week's leave and went down to Jerusalem. I found there a frustrated section—for even on leave we always spent hours with each other talking shop. The officer had been my very best N.C.O. in Greece, and I had left him alone to watch the crossings of the Corinth Canal bridge, a position demanding responsibility and some courage—not, of course, what a platoon sergeant in the infantry would call courage, but the quality is basically the same. Merely because he was half a Jew and had a Jewish name, the Palestine Police dis-

trusted him. The blazing conceit of that brave but incompetent force still infuriates me. As if we did not know a thousand times better than they whom we could trust!

When he told me that he was going to ask for a transfer I decided to apply for the Jerusalem–Tel Aviv section myself; partly from feeling out of the world in Tripoli and unable to use my European experience and languages, partly because I had an immense pride in the curious comradeship which we were achieving all the way from Cairo to the Upper Euphrates. Palestine was the weak spot of our travellers' club. Field Security was not respected, and the standard of liaison and hospitality was poor.

Early in 1942 I moved to Jerusalem and began the most consistently and consciously happy year of my life. The Intelligence staff at Palestine Headquarters had all changed. My chief was Henry Hunloke, before the war a Member of Parliament—I never heard him speak but he must have been very able in the diplomacies of the smoking-room—and the G III was J. V. Prendergast, who oddly combined an Irish wildness of temperament with an English shyness. It took us only a month of motionless tom-cat watching of each other to decide that our ideas of work, play and the Palestine problem were very much the same.

The duties of Field Security in a country under British civil administration should, on the face of it, have been limited and dull. There could be no interference with internal security, which was the job of the Palestine Police, nor with politics. The local sport of buying and stealing British arms was not so much our affair as that of the Special Investigation Branch of the Military Police. Even the detection of persons immigrating from Central Europe

and the Balkans and pretending to be Jews could be undertaken much more efficiently by the Intelligence Service of the Jewish Agency than by the British.

In fact, when I look back on Palestine it seems to me that the most important part of the work was to appreciate what Field Security should not do without orders—a very different position from Syria. But our conception of ourselves as the essential oil in the machinery was still valid, and soon led to all the orders we could handle. It was up to a keen and lively section to sell itself, for the service which it could offer to customers was not always clear till it was demonstrated.

In Jerusalem were several headquarters of the most secret branches of Intelligence, employing aliens whose intentions, movements and indiscretions were occasionally brought to our notice. There was the printing of army maps. There were camps of allies all the way down the coast to Gaza and Rafah and prisoner-of-war camps and the great permanent camp at Sarafand—most musical of names for a spot most desolate in its boredom—where the Jewish companies under training were torn between the desire to go into action against Germans, as eventually they did, and the political necessity for staying at home to fight Arabs or British or both should the war end unexpectedly. Besides these fairly straightforward security problems, there was the eternal Palestine question, upon minor aspects of which we were sometimes engaged and allowed an opinion so long as it was expressed with sufficient humility.

An official opinion, I mean. So far as personal opinions were concerned, all the Army Intelligence officers talked Palestine day and night. It was difficult to make them understand the full force of Zionism since, though they knew the promise and the difficulties of translating it into reality, they could not know the conditions which the

promise was intended to relieve. They always had in mind the comparatively prosperous British Jews who were unlikely to want to die for anything but Britain, and so they failed to understand the meaning of Palestine to the Polish or Roumanian villager living precariously on the edge of pogrom or starvation. They set no limits at all to his capacity for tortuous intrigue—indeed there were few to set—but they did not give him credit for being potentially the finest fighting man on earth because it was so much easier for him than for the rest of us, who have begun to complicate our nationalism with wider loyalties, to know beyond any doubt the value of his death.

Among the police and the administration there was a fixed idea that the Arab was a better soldier than the Jew. You could not discuss it with them at all. And that was natural enough, since Arab prowess in the rebellion, such as it was, had been evident to the plain man, and Jewish skill-at-arms only to the imaginative. They saw the coming struggle as Arab raider versus expatriated pawnbroker, whereas a truer parallel was European revolutionary versus an exclamatory native who would far rather gesticulate than die. But they were of course right in considering that any Jewish Palestine would be a soldier's nightmare. It can, in theory, be occupied by an invader and held, whereas the fertile crescent surrounding it cannot be occupied at all. In war Israel is condemned to defence and savage reprisal.

My new section was a beauty—outrageously merry and loyal. The only weakness—and it was far too frequent in Field Security—was the sergeant-major. He was an ex-guardsmen, and so had the normal qualities of a good charwoman; he could be trusted to see that our billet in Tel Aviv was clean. What else he did I never enquired too closely. Administration flowed smoothly and—if we needed comforts to which we were not entitled—expertly from the

typewriter and long experience of a former corporal of the Black Watch.

All that year I was caressed by luck. On the evening of my arrival in Jerusalem I called on Haim Wardi to see if my charming whitewashed hovel at the bottom of his garden were free. It was not, but he could do still better. He told me that he was just leaving to join up as a private in the Jewish battalion, and presented his house to me on a peppercorn rent of three conditions: that I would put him up when he came home on week-end leave, that I would look after his dog and that I would do my best to preserve the services of his cook.

The first delighted me, for he had a mind which was incalculable as a peasant's white wine. According to his mood, it could be dry or bitter or naturally sparkling, but it was never watery. The dog, I fear, was treated somewhat perfunctorily, for I have no pleasure in dogs. Too slavish a devotion embarrasses me, especially when accompanied by an unpleasant smell. To keep the cook, a Polish Jewess of such rigid orthodoxy that she might well consider herself defiled by a Gentile, I did my best; and she responded at once, like any other woman, to greed and admiration. Traditional Jewish cooking is disastrous when dealing with flesh and fowl whole or normally sliced; but given a sharp knife, a mincing machine and unlimited herbs and onions it is worth serious attention.

It was a discreet house for visitors who did not wish to come too openly to my office, and a joyous house for parties. Today the frontier between Jew and Arab must run nearly through the garden. I conjure the ghosts of love and good-fellowship that they may rise and tempt too serious a sentry to lay down his rifle and share beneath the trees an illegal bottle with his enemy.

At the end of May defeat in the desert brought up to Palestine some of the more movable encumbrances of war,

such as rich Egyptians, army wives, interneers, the naval depots and intelligence organisations so secret that they were unlikely to have any immediate effect on the war. This exodus involved me in an adventure which began as a fairy-tale and ended in futility, thus closely resembling a nineteenth-century atheist's vision of human life except that it was highly enjoyable while it lasted.

At the outbreak of war it had only been possible to intern or expel the most dangerous of the many thousands of Italians in Egypt. When Rommel's advance threatened Alexandria, there was a further weeding out of Italians. A party of them was sent up from Egypt to Palestine, housed in a monastery near Bethlehem and given a limited liberty of movement.

Sansom, my opposite number in Cairo—one of the very few of us who really did justify his existence by occasionally arresting an undoubted spy—wrote to me privately that among these Italians was a young lawyer of some promise whom he knew for certain to be anti-fascist, though his contacts had been suspicious. He thought I might find him very useful.

I had better call the man X—since his promise as a lawyer has been largely fulfilled. He spoke good Arabic and was all in favour of relieving boredom by a little excitement; so I instructed him to mix with the local Arabs and to be more fascist than the fascists. He came in with various small and useful reports, and then produced a story that the German Consul in Jerusalem had, before the war, established a considerable cache of arms in one of the many caves between Bethlehem and the Dead Sea, ready for a rising if the Germans reached the frontiers of Palestine.

We were all, including X, pretty doubtful about the truth of the tale, but it was possible. So he kept his highly intelligent nose on the trail. At last, after infinite coffees

and deserts of pointless talk, he was promised by a local notable that he should see the cave. He was taken to several, all empty—except for the unimaginable presence of the Dead Sea Scrolls—by excitably suspicious Arabs at some real risk to his life.

Henry Hunloke, though as sceptical as I, gave me permission to go ahead, so I asked for an N.C.O. speaking Arabic and Italian to help X. That such a request to Headquarters was quite straightforward and could be easily fulfilled is a comment on our usefulness in the Middle East. The Commandant sent me a young Englishman of unlimited courage and astonishing and wholly Italian good looks.

He and X together made further progress. The Arab notable was willing to discuss plans for a rising with any German agent whose authority was beyond doubt, but nobody else. I decided to be the local head of the German Secret Service myself.

The loan of a flat for the meeting was not difficult to arrange. Jerusalem had several mysterious inhabitants whose cover was unbreakable and whose connection with the British Government was not easily to be traced by the curious—even by an Arab officer of the Palestine Police if, as we had some reason to believe, one of them was near the heart of the business. The gentleman who arranged to be out while we used his premises could very well have been a German agent.

I staged a show straight out of any boy's story. It would not have taken in an intelligent European—unless he had been reading too many of them—but it was calculated to appeal to the Arab passion for dramatic unreality: a failing which does not lead him into as much trouble as might be expected, since it is balanced by a tiptoe, deer-like quality of caution.

When X led the notable and his three or four retainers

into the room, they were faced by a desk behind which sat a figure in a white suit with a Nazi arm-band, and a black bag over his head pierced by Ku Klux Klan eye-holes. Behind him, standing to attention were three large, silent toughs, also black-bagged—among them, Prendergast, whose appearance of Teutonic stiffness and brutality behind his tommy-gun was wholly terrifying. I rose with courtesy—for the principal German agent would surely have some knowledge of local customs, though unfortunately he spoke no Arabic—and my address of welcome was beautifully interpreted by X. Except for occasional harsh commands, we used French, on the grounds that X did not understand German nor I Italian.

Our guest was a man of distinction in his middle forties, exquisitely robed and bearded. In spite of the extraordinary spectacle, his face showed only the slightest flicker of surprise, instantly extinguished; he might have been entering the tent or house of some distant cousin whom he had never had the good fortune to meet before. It is that fineness of breeding which has always enchanted the not so rare Englishmen who have loved, pampered and courted the Arabs for the last hundred years. It is impossible not to respect and admire an aristocrat even if you know—or perhaps because you know—that under the perfection of good manners is a childish heart seething with fear and distrust, and balancing the advantage of treachery against the convention which forbids it.

This minor and slippery Saladin infected me with a chivalry which I am sure my Fuehrer would have censured. When the hour came for the evening prayer, I withdrew the masked chorus, leaving notable and retainers alone with Allah and all our arms. The gesture did indeed impress him, and upon our return relations over the coffee were most cordial. Except for the taking of a solemn oath of brotherhood, the meeting led nowhere. That was to be

expected. He sent his regards to the Fuehrer, having in his mind, I imagine, a mere picture of envied power to shed blood noisily, and never perceiving that his daily solitudes with God made nonsense of that intolerable plebeian.

A second meeting was marked by even greater social ease—especially on our part, for we had at first omitted to ventilate the black bags, and conversation on a hot Palestine night, let alone enthusiastic heiling of Hitler, left us gasping and sweating in our home-made Turkish baths. Confidence seemed to be growing. I bought from the notable an Italian automatic. X recommended the purchase on the grounds that it was a gesture of trust, admitting us, as it were, to the arms-dealing club.

But trust was still far from absolute. When we came out of the block of flats after giving our Arab guests an hour to get away, their hired car charged round a corner at us trying to illuminate our faces with the headlights. It was a clumsy attempt and it failed; but then there was a half-hearted attempt to follow us. We separated and took to lanes and backyards, making such speed as was possible with tommy-guns down our trouser legs, and reunited over cool drinks in my garden.

X and the Arabic-speaking corporal who had been lent to me were, however, very nearly in trouble. They were taken out into a barrenness of hills to see more caves, and, once there, were suddenly told that it was known that the principal German agent was a British officer. X, with great presence of mind, replied contemptuously that of course he was. What else could he be and still operate successfully and unsuspected? This answer surprised and delighted the notable—who had only been trying a third-degree guess—and both men reported that it was quite safe to continue the meetings.

We no longer believed in the cache of arms, and we had established with reasonable certainty that our man was not

in touch with any real German agent or network. The notable was ready to commit himself to support of the enemy provided Rommel was near enough to protect him from the consequences; but that was nothing new. Plenty of influential Palestine Arabs were willing to be polite to the Germans—not that they at all preferred them to the British, but they approved their methods of dealing with Jews. The question thus arose what use further meetings could be. We might indeed set up as *agents provocateurs*, but we had quite enough potential trouble in Palestine without provoking more. For us the operation had no longer any clear objective. For Cairo it might have some. So Henry Hunloke reported what we had done and asked for orders. Cairo replied in effect that if Household and Prendergast had now enjoyed themselves sufficiently to return to their normal routine, nothing would be lost by their doing so.

I agreed with the verdict thankfully. I felt that I could continue the meetings for some time without embarrassing I (b) or the Palestine Administration, but I could not bear the thought of arresting a man with whom I had taken a very solemnly sworn oath of brotherhood. Honour is a luxury which both spy and security officer must sometimes be prepared to forego; nevertheless to break an oath is a crime against humanity. I see and saw the difference between that and fair deception as resembling the difference between the murder of a civilian and killing an enemy in uniform.

There were two sequels to this pointless adventure. Prendergast, thirteen years later in Kenya, attended a meeting of the Mau Mau and won a George Cross for it. I have never heard the story from him, but the memory of our parlour theatre, completely without danger, may have, as it were, inoculated him against stage nerves when he engaged in the real professional play with its appalling risk of instant and disgusting death.

The other sequel is a record of sheer naughtiness. I gave the Italian automatic which I had bought to an officer leaving for Persia at short notice, who had no pistol of his own. GHQ were then in a state of justifiable excitement over the number of captured weapons which were reaching an eager market. All road and frontier controls were ordered to put the possessor on a charge if he could not prove that he had come innocently by his weapon.

I was sitting in my office one evening with a conscience exceptionally clear when a solemn sergeant of the Special Investigation Branch—the detective branch of the military police—requested a private interview with me. That seemed unusual—for liaison was at officer level—but I saw the light when, after some professional clearing of the throat, he asked me if I would care to make a statement regarding a pistol which Captain So-and-So said that I had given him. The word *given* was pronounced in the sedate inverted commas of the police, and I could sense a well-controlled enthusiasm that at last the S.I.B. had been able to pin a crime on Field Security.

Our relations with them were always most friendly but marked by disapproving silences, somewhat resembling those between the amateur sleuth and the inspector in a detective story. For example, it was the duty of the S.I.B. to trace and apprehend a deserter. It might be our duty to watch the deserter's contacts and even to meet him for an occasional drink without hinting to him or anyone else that we knew exactly what he was. The result was that they considered us irresponsible, while we, more in touch with politics, would sometimes hide our eyes in horror at the constable's heavy foot loudly descending upon bridges too flimsy for an angel's toe.

I pretended embarrassment. I allowed it to be dragged from me that I had indeed bought the pistol for money. I would not say where. I even signed with trembling hand a

statement, and murmured that I hoped Palestine Headquarters would be able to clear me. So the sergeant's captain had a final polish put upon his buttons and called on Henry Hunloke. He, warned by me that the enquiry was on the way, but quite ignorant of my un-Christian behaviour, of course said with his usual humorous and impenetrable courtesy that my arms-dealing had the approval of high authority. Ever after I could see upon the dead faces—when sober—of the S.I.B. a guarded determination not even to hint that the Intelligence staff were selling pistols and spending the proceeds upon alcohol and women.

Early in 1943 I followed the pistol to Paiforce, a new Command, entirely separate from Middle East Command, which had been formed under General Wilson to hold Persia and Iraq against a very possible German offensive through the Caucasus, and to keep the road and railway open for the American supplies which were pouring into Russia through the Persian Gulf ports.

I was offered the job of Commandant of Field Security and of course accepted with pride and delight. But between my acceptance and departure Paiforce died—though still preserving an appearance of life from busy movements of the beetles on its corpse. The German threat was obviously over for ever when their armies fell back from Stalingrad and the Volga. Wilson left to take over Middle East Command.

I arrived in Baghdad in March. The staff, occupying a large housing estate, was to be seen at its very worst. This desert suburbia, coloured yellow and mud upon a plain of mud, was itself enough to rot any generosity of spirit among those who worked in it. The one object of every administrative soldier—he was often unconscious of it and

saw it as duty—was to increase the work of his department so that it should not be abolished. And that would be true of the army of any nation, for as soon as a soldier gets into a chair which is not operational he takes on all the vices of a civil servant.

Having created Paiforce, the War Office could not be expected to put a brutal end to it within six months; and the Command did have an excuse for existence since the Persian Gulf was too far away to be easily administered by Middle East. Just as in the days of the Pharaohs there was only one road from the Nile to Mesopotamia, though ours cut straight across the desert and theirs circled round it through Syria.

The fault seemed to lie—but here I am out of my depth—in too rigid a system of administration. If war requires a Command responsible, without any intermediary, only to Whitehall, then it must be a General Headquarters; and if it is a GHQ, then it must have all the administrative offices of a GHQ in spite of the fact that there is a bare half day's work for any of them. Heaven knows what Paiforce cost the taxpayer, simply because established custom prevented Treasury and War Office from limiting a GHQ to the size, say, of an Army staff.

The result was that captains became colonels, and majors, brigadiers, in spite of themselves. Promptly they acquired a vested interest in creating enough paper to give their jobs a semblance of indispensability. Even those who were only too willing to lose exalted rank on condition that they might leave Paiforce for a more active front found it difficult to do so without pulling strings in Cairo or London. There was indeed a small office at GHQ responsible for reducing staff where possible, but to go in there and submit a paper actually recommending reduction was considered as unconventional as preaching pacifism.

Our living conditions were revolting. Admittedly my

own had been sybaritic, but I would not have minded a clean change to canvas and open air. As it was, we were crammed into requisitioned hotels along the Tigris, from which we poured every morning at eight on to the ferries across to our housing estate. The kitchens and sanitary arrangements of these detestable hotels were quite inadequate to deal with us, and drink on either side of the river was pretty well limited to the Baghdad water supply. For my evening relaxation I was reduced to a couple of shots of palm toddy in the privacy, when there was any, of my literally stinking bedroom. There were two beds in it, and the other was reserved for visiting officers. I never knew to what pillowed head I should be compelled to be polite, nor whether it would prefer to snore, to converse or to vomit.

Not everyone loathed Baghdad as much as I. DOWALL the Tigris was a noble thick-walled house, built by some rich merchant in days when the trader was the only tourist, where mysterious Intelligence officers lived with silver and mahogany. What they did I was never quite sure and, as Commandant, Field Security, I had to set an example by refraining from indiscreet questions. But among them was Alec Waugh, as always on enviably good terms with his surroundings. Occasional meals together reminded me that the hideousness of that squalid city should be easily endurable to the accustomed traveller.

At the beginning of the hot weather, messes were at last organised. The Intelligence staff was allotted a house with a flowered courtyard and, on two sides of it, a line of white-washed cells in which one could set up a camp bed and an orange box and enjoy privacy. It was so genial a mess that I wondered if my preference for hotels—excluding Baghdad—had not been entirely wrong. Our mess secretary was a *bon vivant* who had had some experience of catering for a London club. His duties at GHQ were of the slightest, and

he spent his time supervising the issue of rations and the Iraqi cooks. What that man did—I am ashamed that I have forgotten his name—with ration beef, bully, potatoes and onions was incredible. Even on the rare occasions when one could not enjoy the meal, one could be entertained by the ingenuity of the attempt. Liquid supplies became plentiful, for every officer on tour, especially if he were bound for Teheran, was expected to bring back whatever he could buy and carry. I myself had the luck to find a NAAFI about to close down in Kirkuk, and returned to Baghdad with dozens of gin and Palestine wine in the back of the car.

Once away from Baghdad and on tour among the sections depression was impossible. I never cared for central Iraq, since there is no colour in it but the weary sky, no accident of ground but irrigation ditches and no timber except for the palms along the Tigris. How the human spirit could have flowered in that world of fertile mud is difficult for the European to understand. Jerusalem and Hamadan, Caesarea and Damascus and Aleppo—in all those I could have lived and been content. But in Ur and Babylon and the valley of the Nile no raising of eyes to the glory of ziggurat or pyramid could have prevented me from packing upon my asses such wives as they could accommodate and departing like Abraham to find the God of the hills. Even Nineveh, where rolling grasslands at least feel their way towards the mountains of Kurdistan, would have been home enough. Yet Nineveh contributed to civilisation little but a savage military aristocracy. Perhaps the long, tranquil periods of history can only be attained under the flat sedative of mud.

North and east of Nineveh and Mosul, Iraq becomes a land of poplar and willow and rushing water, with a distant glint of snow. At Mosul was a splendid section, almost entirely concerned with civil security. Among their respon-

sibilities were the wild Turkish frontier, the Persian frontier where enemy agents were active, the Baghdad Railway and the town of Mosul, always smouldering with the ancient enmity between Kurd and Arab. I found them isolated, grossly overworked, learning the local languages and apparently enjoying every changing month. I could do no more than see they had all the comforts which could be given, and a very fair share of the small secret fund.

A long tour took me to Basra and Abadan, and twice across Persia. The vital road to Russia was intolerably dangerous. It was only wide enough for two vehicles carefully to pass, and up and down the hills hurtled the lorries of the United Kingdom Commercial Corporation, driven by reckless Persians until brakes and springs fell apart. Added to these terrorists were the American trucks, nearly all with coloured drivers. It seemed to be the American plan to keep the transport in first-class condition but to work the drivers into the ground. There were many cases of these tireless and gallant negroes falling asleep at the wheel. At least they were generally believed to have fallen asleep. There was seldom anyone left to confirm the truth.

My driver and I decided to take a more ancient road across the mountains and live to fight another day. There, instead of the frantic lifting of supplies to Russia, we caught up the summer migration of the Lurs. It was a scene from the long past of humanity, and by now, except in the heart of Central Asia, it may have vanished from the world.

I could no more number the tribe than Moses. There may have been ten thousand; there may have been fifty thousand. They were dark, eager-looking men and women, all with the same peculiar nose—a long, delicate instrument with a curiously arched flair to the nostrils and a slight hook which had neither the beak-like quality of the Semitic nor the solidity of the Roman or the Basque. They

were all dressed in black, with little colour. They moved with their herds of sheep, goats and cattle, and all their possessions on the backs of pack animals: ponies, donkeys or camels. It took us a whole day in low gear to get through them, and they were remarkably good-tempered over the intrusion—especially since we had no Persian for politenesses or exhortation and were limited to the common exclamations of soldier's Arabic, of which they seemed to understand about as much as we did.

At Kasvin we entered the Russian zone, and at last I was face to face with the almost mythical people whose refugees I had comforted as a youth, around whose frontiers, like a gipsy skirting a park wall, I had roamed as a commercial traveller, whose entry into the war as allies had brought us all the certainty that some time, in years to come, the enemy would be exhausted. To us in the garrison of the Middle East the entry of America was not so immediately encouraging. As our parochial minds saw it, the Indian Ocean was likely to be lost to Japan and the Middle East to become the middle of a sandwich.

I cannot imagine what my private excitement wanted from the Russians. I knew they had two legs. I was perfectly familiar with their uniforms and their faces. They did no more than salute me smartly as they raised a barrier to let me in, and salute again twelve miles further on when they let me out. But in my imagination—and that is better than nothing—the world of 1913 had returned.

Teheran was my first taste of civilisation since Jerusalem, for between the two cities there is none except in the eyes of those passionate suitors of the Arab, tragic in their surrender to so elusive a love. The food and wine were superb, for the Persians are among those nations of the world who care profoundly for their bellies. The capital was full of lovely women. I should, I think, have enjoyed myself if fate had led me from the Bank of Roumania to

the Anglo-Persian, but the hot-house life of Bucharest would not have been left so far behind as I imagined.

From a professional point of view the place was a maze of Intelligence activities. Complications wound in upon themselves, and a move on the board had to be thought out as far ahead as in post-war Vienna or Berlin. There were two sections in the city, and the work of one of them was so secret that I could hardly fathom it myself. Some of the best men had disappeared into Lord knew what back streets upon what duty, and I could only impress it upon anyone who was not too deep in plots to listen that they were, after all, soldiers, and that I was responsible for their welfare.

We returned to Baghdad by Hamadan and Kermanshah—a routine journey marked only by the cliff-covering inscription of Darius and the sight of a big, gaunt wolf tearing unconcernedly at the carcass of a dead donkey. We, too, had halted for lunch, and I watched him for about a minute without realising that he was not a dog. As soon as I did realise it and had merely conceived—not moving hand or eye—the unkind and atavistic thought of taking a shot at him, he loped away. I have read, like all of us, of African game permitting well-fed lions to stroll through their midst. I have seen in Dorset a vixen and three half-grown cubs walk through grazing rabbits which barely raised their heads. Smell seems insufficient to explain this knowledge by one animal of another's mood. It would be less mysterious, less vaguely telepathic, if around each individual were a field of force, visible to the animal as, reputedly, it is to the mystic, and changing its appearance according to intent.

All through this tour and in Baghdad I was in close touch with the Indian Army. The British officers sometimes seemed to be trying too hard and obviously to conform to our easier disciplines. What I saw of the Indian

officers I liked, for by temperament I tip my hat to any man or woman who possesses effortlessly two completely different cultures. But the Hindu soldier puzzled me. Some of the sections engaged on straight military security were half Indian and half British, and it was my habit—borrowed from Robin Wordsworth—to interview every man at some length. I could not enquire after their families, since that might be considered improper, and the right approach was hard to find. They on their part seemed to ask for little but promotion—generally for the odd reason that some relative had been promoted. The excuse to Western ways of thought seemed insufficient. No doubt the poverty of India accounted for the begging; the difference of pay between lance-corporal and corporal meant far more to them than to British troops. But why so little dignity below the rank of havildar, and such impressive, bewhiskered swordsman's swagger above it?

I managed to extract myself from Paiforce by temporarily exchanging jobs with Oswald Ormsby, then second-in-command in Cairo. That gave him two months of freedom to wander through unknown lands, and to decide if he would like the job of Commandant himself. Meanwhile I occupied his chair and flat. How good or bad I was as Commandant I do not know—probably very acceptable to the men and less to the officers, since I have never enough patience with a man I consider an ass; and that is unfair, for he can be a willing and excellent ass and may be used as such. With the 'I' staff I collaborated easily enough except on the one point of wasting Field Security sections. While active commands were calling for them and the invasion of Sicily was about to begin, our men were employed on work which could be done as well by local *gendarmérie* or the British Consuls and their expert agents.

While I was away the Middle East had become no more than a busy and indispensable base, heavily engaged in

Balkan politics and waiting for the chance to follow up its commandos. The most interesting security job I could find was to take over the Haifa section. That permitted me to retain my rank of major, since a long campaign by the Commandant to get field rank for a few of his officers had at last succeeded. For a few weeks I wondered at my lack of ambition, but self-questioning was soon forgotten in the joy of being independent again with a sound and most affectionate section, most of whom were old hands at the game.

Our bread-and-butter jobs were control of the Port of Haifa with its trade, its trickle of Jewish immigrants and its commando base; the Lebanese frontier post of Ras Naqura; and the naval depot which had been hurriedly removed from Alexandria in 1942 and ever since, in spite of barbed wire and a desperate effort to catch up with the stock-taking, had supplied the Jews and Arabs with all the explosives they required. We also kept an eye on the coast as far south as Nataniya, on the Arabs, largely Christian, of Upper Galilee, and—though the prospects of decisive battle had evidently been postponed—upon the Plain of Armageddon.

Another important duty was to stay in close touch with the excitements of expatriate military. The Greeks, as usual divided unforgivingly between monarchists and left-wing republicans, had a mutiny on their hands. The Yugoslavs, who seemed to be near-communists to a man, were indiscreet as any boasting bourgeois, and if I had been an officer of their own political police—and not on British territory—I should have shot half a dozen of them to encourage the rest. The most time-wasting puzzle of all was caused by a mere three Albanians. They were expelled from the Greek Brigade as incorrigible criminals, and were promptly sacked from every civilian job we obtained for them. The military police refused to lock them up on the

grounds that they were civilians. The civil police claimed they were military and would have nothing to do with them. So they became the problem children of Field Security, and camped in the section yard crying loudly in Albanian for a non-existent Consul. Sometimes we would chase them down the street with oaths. Sometimes, worn out by their importunities, we would give them old shirts or a drink. I should be responsible for them still if some fool of an Albanian in Cairo had not suddenly declared himself honorary Consul. I instantly despatched to him his three compatriots. If they ran true to form, they fully justified his appointment.

With the French, except for genial and routine liaison on the frontier, we had little to do. There was, however, a charming, middle-aged French officer who boldly stole his young sister-in-law from a Palestine convent, tried to smuggle her over the frontier into Lebanon and was caught. The scandal was enough to convulse the police and the religious. Satisfied that he was most respectable and that it really was at his wife's request that he so suspiciously travelled with her pretty sister, I mentioned a weak spot in the military control of railway passengers and thereafter—except in a verbal report to Henry Hunloke who could always be trusted to appreciate any illegalities which contributed to the smooth running of our world—denied all knowledge of him.

Russians entered our orbit when the prisoners-of-war freed in Italy were despatched through Haifa on their long journey across the desert and Persia. They were given several opportunities to declare whether they wanted to return to the Soviet Union or not. Most, like any other soldiers, wanted to go home; but some were pitiable in their indecision, fearing that the invitation to declare their sympathies was a trap. I saw the conducting officer on his return to Haifa and was appalled by his story—for our

admiration of Russian victories led us all, with no evidence but wishful thinking, to believe that their intransigent politics had been greatly exaggerated. He had handed over his batch of prisoners in Persia. They were welcomed as if they had been deserters. Their salutes were not returned. Their badges of rank were torn off. Under cold, armed escort they were herded into the waiting transport. It was clear that Stalin had meant exactly what he said when he announced what would happen to any Russian who surrendered.

Civil security work was quieter and deeper than in the Jerusalem of 1942. Field Security had no executive powers and paid no agents, but inevitably we were very well informed. The Haifa office was sometimes comparable to a provincial newspaper office, with thirteen fascinated and unconventional reporters under myself as editor.

The Arab rebellion had been suppressed in 1938. The German menace had been removed. So the Jewish extremists were at last free to attack the British. In Haifa they blew up the Income Tax office—the most completely satisfying use for gelignite that I can imagine—and part of Police Headquarters. The position of the Jewish Agency, which was responsible under the Palestine Government for the administration of the Jewish National Home, was extraordinarily difficult. The Agency was willing to use the Hagana, its not very secret army, to help us against the terrorist organisation, the Irgun Zvai Leumi; but that policy, at the best of times half-hearted, was far from rewarded by the Palestine Police who twice allowed their bag of interned terrorists to escape. History, so far as I know, has not yet revealed what the Agency's policy really was in 1944 and 1945.

Inevitably the Hagana had close contacts with Military Intelligence. There was the question of the Jewish battalions, the real object of which both we and they

courteously pretended to ignore. There were the desperate bargainings with the Gestapo across the Turkish frontier. In Haifa I was on most friendly terms with Emmanuel Wilensky, reputed to be the chief of the Hagana Intelligence, who was interrogating refugees, sending invaluable information direct to London and protecting us against the infiltration of enemy agents far more efficiently than could we or the police immigration authorities. Friendship with the Jewish officials was easy and profitable, for each side precisely understood which duties we had in common and which we had not.

I remember so well—and remembered especially in the bitter year of 1947—the monthly conferences of Defence Security Officers and Field Security Officers. There we were, the pro-Jews balancing the pro-Arabs, without a policy or even the hope of a policy except to keep the peace while the Government at home made up its mind. We could see no solution to the Palestine problem but partition, and we were certain that peaceful partition was impossible without a powerful British garrison destined, by guerrilla warfare and assassination, to crowd the cemeteries already over-populated by the gallant dead of the despairing Palestine Police. To evacuate Palestine and to allow Jews and Arabs to fight it out was a solution which only occurred to us in moments of exasperation with both contenders, and we were ashamed of the ill-tempered thought. I cannot believe that Bevin would ever have accepted so savage and irresponsible an end to the British mandate if Americans had then realised that, outside the movies and the Seven Pillars, Arabs really existed.

We loved Palestine and the great ideal, and the Jews knew we did. It was the question of unlimited immigration which divided us. The British insisted that it was politically impossible. So it was without another Arab rebellion. We also said that it was economically impossible. So it was

without a miracle. Our fault in Palestine was that we could never believe that we had laid the right foundations for a miracle.

There cannot have been many of my Jewish colleagues who rejoiced at the death of a British soldier. Their eyes were too clear to be taken in by their own propaganda. From their point of view, once they were prepared to face independence and its consequences, there may have been no other solution but armed revolt. Yet, if it was necessary that the experiment, the patience and the partnership should end in blood, the taste of it must sometimes have been indistinguishable from the salt of tears; and hatred easier to scream when reaching for a cheque book in New York than when the foresight of a rifle covered the enemy and creator, and the finger had to move.

In the course of 1944 it was brought to the notice of the War Office that some of the regular troops had been in the Middle East for seven years, and some of the amateurs for five. So far there had been little loud complaint, for it was obvious that there were not the ships to move us nor the men to replace us. But when the Mediterranean was again open, neither the soldiers nor the few Penelopes who had remained faithful were any longer prepared to take absence for granted. In January 1945 my own turn came, and I committed, with some misgiving, my wife, my two children and myself to the squalid and lavatorial accommodation of a troopship.

That I had been able to remarry I owed to the loyalty and understanding of Marina, herself since amply comforted. That as a security officer I was permitted to choose a Hungarian subject, whose history and sympathies only I could guarantee, was due to the astonishing help and trust of Henry Hunloke and my Commandant. Even so the

difficulties were nearly insuperable; and that youthful practice in stubbornness which had led me only to great friendship where there should have been great love was at long last justified and rewarded. Whatever power displayed for me on the hills above Jerusalem the sight of the full moon rising and the sun setting, both simultaneously poised upon the horizon—I did not then know it was a familiar omen—preserved us and granted an end to all those emotional wanderings which are more tolerable to read of than they ever were to live.

It is a story more idyllic and less bitter than the other, but too full of private sanctities. I can write of the self which was a past guest in my body, not of the self which is, for he is only half mine. The motives which I have ascribed to him in the limited context of war are those he really had, yet of course there were more which I cannot attempt to interpret. Love must have a poet for its author and narrative of such frankness that age would find it too intolerably moving and youth too destructive of illusion.

That was the end of my war except for a ridiculous adventure under most questionable auspices which took me to Germany for the last two weeks. In the vast warren of London University where the staff of the Ministry of Information incontinently proliferated, one breeding burrow belonged to the War Office. Some servant of State, doubtless sincere in the appreciation of his own ingenuity, had convinced the Treasury that officers capable of writing coherently upon a typewriter could, if directed by other officers, do a better job of reporting than experienced war correspondents directed by a newspaper. True, the department suggested subjects to military writers of the calibre of Cyril Falls and John North, but they hardly needed its assistance.

Into this burrow went I, silently asking pardon from the

Paiforce sections whose ration allowance, in spite of my correspondence and interviews and appeals, had only been enough to buy one small native meal a day. The appointment carried staff pay, War Office pay and the privilege of living at home. For some weeks I drank with such courtesy as I could summon the Ministry of Information tea, and occasionally enquired if I could have enough work to justify the expenditure. It was at last suggested that I might like to go to Germany and write up the recent battles of the Guards Armoured Division.

I was supposed to fly direct to Main Headquarters of 21st Army Group, but my department made a mistake in the movement order and despatched me to Rear Headquarters at Brussels. Once there it was pointed out that, though my credentials appeared to be in order, the position of Main Headquarters was secret and could not be revealed. Through the years we security men had carried out too thorough an education. As Brussels could neither turn me back nor send me forward, they told me to take a train to Genepp—which I think was railhead for the left flank facing Holland—and then, like a stranger in a London street, to ask again.

I spent a soldierly night on the floor of a battered building in Genepp and grabbed a filling supper from a field kitchen. In the morning I had a journey, through sheets of rain, straight out of Kafka—by random transport to an unknown destination the name of which I was forbidden to ask. That in fact I arrived in time for lunch was proof that five years had not been wholly wasted.

The next day I travelled up to Soltau with a press conducting officer, passing on the way through the deep valleys of bulldozed brick which were all that was left of Munster and Osnabruck. Having no transport of my own, which made impossible the schedule of visits tentatively proposed to me, I took the Press Camp for my head-

quarters and borrowed lifts in any available cars, collecting impressions of the end of the story which had begun for me in the Cairo of 1939.

The last week of the war seemed to be marked by vicious rather than determined fighting. In the great arc formed by the North Sea and the Russian front an unknown number of the enemy was compressed into an ever-decreasing space. The country itself added to the prevailing air of mystery, for the extent of forest was almost equal to cultivated land; and upon the network of good roads, silent and empty, one had the sensation of malevolent watchers who, but for the fear of retaliation, would turn car or tank to baked gingerbread. Between the woods were the claret-coloured villages, the deep red eaves of the gables almost touching the ground, intact except for the odd house which had refused or omitted to hang out its white flag and been blasted by the passing armour.

For me, who had spent my non-combatant war in close and continual contact with civilians, the cold, necessary militarism was a shock. Fraternisation did not exist, for the Germans were untouchable, not only from our antipathy but in fact. Pubs and shops were shut. Billets were emptied of their inhabitants before the troops moved in. There were no women to be seen. The world of steel and trees was inhuman.

The concentration camps had had their effect. Many of the troops had seen Belsen and Sandbostel with their own eyes; most had talked to someone who did see them. Prisoners-of-war, except for S.S. men, were considered blameless, but I had the impression that when any German civilian complained of our frigid severity—for they were whining already—he was likely to hear the word Belsen in reply.

I myself was in Sandbostel two days after it was captured. Many of the prisoners had been evacuated, but little

could yet be done to clean the camp. I suppose I have seen more than most men of extremes of filth and poverty in strange places, but Sandbostel was a degradation of the human body beyond experience or imagination. The pervading smell was that of very dirty pigs. Even the comparison is today meaningless, for there are few farms like those of my boyhood where you could smell the pigs two hundred yards away. Amidst the dysentery dung squatted or walked figures in striped pyjamas. It was the camp uniform. They were more human squatting; when they walked, you could see the terrible thinness and the puppet-like uncertainty of legs. It rained continuously. They no longer noticed weather.

There was a story then current that when Belsen was taken a great trench was dug and the camp guards were ordered to fill it with the bodies of the dead inmates of the camp. While they were down in the trench the bulldozers, without any definite order given, swept back the earth over the guards as well. It is hard to conceive British troops taking into their own hands revenge for outraged humanity; but, if the story is true, I do not think the men concerned have any more reason to reproach themselves, merely because their court of justice was instinctive, than the jury at a murder trial. No civilised man has ever had to weigh such evidence as was presented to them.

Travel had lost the slap-dash quality which normally characterised military driving. Roads off the main axis of the advance were avoided unless the tracks of our own vehicles were plain to see. Roads where the crown but not the verge had been cleared of mines by the indefatigable sappers were taken cautiously; and trucks which a week before would have roared past each other, right-hand wheels off the metal and damn the consequences, edged by, wings almost touching, while each driver tried to avoid forcing the other on to the verge. It seemed a pity to die in

the last week of the war. Though on parts of the front there was fighting right up to the cease-fire on the morning of May 5, the main objective of unit commanders was to demonstrate but not to lose a life.

For the nights of May 4 and 5 I was staying at one of the headquarters messes of the Guards Armoured Division. They provided me with a comfortable farm room, some excellent light literature and more than my fair share of the wines captured from the cellars of the Burgomaster of Bremen. I must have tried the perfection of their manners hard. I came from the War Office. I was fifteen years older than any of them. My bar of medal ribbons had fallen somewhere into German mud—so dubious a story that I was compelled to a more than English reticence about myself. And, anyway, they proposed to write the story of their own battles without the help of my department.

Yet never for one moment was I allowed to feel an intruder upon the celebrations with which they ended their war; nor, I hope, did any of them perceive a loneliness which could only have surrendered to the wines of Roumania, of Greece, of Syria and Palestine. That final experience of war at last revealed to me its true essence: loneliness among strangers. Hardly ever had I felt it. The army had been to me far more of a home than to my fellows, gathering me again to my own countrymen, permitting the outward pattern of my life to continue and providing it with the illusion of an object.

Craftsman

I AM always ready to hear a man talk shop so long as he can express himself. How he masters his material, why this way and not another, and what the conflict is between his real and his imagined purpose—though this one can but deduce from his eloquence—fascinate me in the hedge-trimmer as in Cellini. That is my excuse, for I have invariably tried to write what I myself would like to to read.

I have reached in my profession only a rank equivalent to a wartime major-general—among, that is, the first two hundred, any of whom may as easily be retired to discomfort as advanced to higher authority. But at that level practice is what counts. One can leave theory to the majors and the marshals, and concentrate upon command.

The life of a writer, especially if he is a slow writer, is inert. He must keep to daily hours, yet he has not the human society of the office; and a desk is less, not more endurable when there is no boss, no subordinate, no secretary for casual conversation, never a cheerful or a difficult client. His working day is short, for no man can drive imagination more than five hours; but at the end of

it he is exhausted and, until unwound by time and alcohol, a poor companion to his family and friends.

In theory he can take a holiday when he wishes; in practice he must ask the boss—himself, that is—whether so unstandardised a workshop can possibly afford it. Nor can he ever know whether idleness is essential, repaying lost time with doubled energy, or whether he is merely being lazy.

There is no one who can promote him, no one whom it is worth while to impress with his ability or charm. What the public think he is worth, that and no more he will be paid. Editor, publisher and agent may ease for him temporarily the working of the law by which they, too, are bound, but he cannot evade it.

What then is the compensation which can bind a man who is no great lover of the study and has indeed far more affinity to the printer than the librarian into a skilled trade where the working conditions are intolerable and the wage uncertain? It is, I suppose, the making of an object which, to human perception, did not exist before.

That phrase is far looser than it appears. Make a chair without any blue-print from a plank in the garage and a fallen pear-tree, and certainly you will have created an object which did not exist before; make imitation Louis XV as efficiently as you like, but it did exist before. The gradations of originality between the two are the business of the critic. That is what he is for: to remind the mass-producer that he could make as much money quite as pleasantly in commerce, and to assure the determined worker in plank and pear-tree that his chair is indeed a creation and commendable, but that he should study the anatomy of sitters.

Thus if we are to judge the self-delusions of a man who claims to make, we must know to what standard he does his making. I do not believe that there is enough compensation in merely giving the public what it thinks

it wants, nor have I any excited opinion of the writer who purposefully and for the sake of forced originality gives the public what it does not. To be a craftsman is to offer your own interpretation of life and its events in an accepted form, and so to handle a familiar medium that it will carry and transmit your own taste, your own faults and your own splendours.

I try to present my goods to the passer-by with the clarity which politeness demands. Then, if he does not like them, there is no shame; and if he does, my personal satisfaction is the greater. For that reward I returned to my craft in 1945 when both economic security and my enjoyment of my fellows would have been better satisfied in Intelligence or the administration of enemy territory. I had only practised the profession for four years and never written anything but security reports for six, but even in war there were indications that my strength was in words. I learned to control my own actions and those of my subordinates as well as any other competent citizen with some experience of leadership, but where I surpassed him was in giving a clear picture of what the actions and their environment were.

I did not become a writer until the far end of my youth, though I showed some promise of it at the beginning. I had a classical education and, from the age of sixteen on, enjoyed it. A sense of style in writing the dead languages I never possessed—a curious failure for one who in later life would pick up the feel and sentence rhythm of a modern language as naturally as a parrot—but in the translating of them I found my only discipline. I was never content until I had rendered into living English what I conceived to be—frequently on inadequate evidence—the thought of the Greek or Latin author. To this carefulness I added that of writing poetry, with a preference for the sonnet or any other verse form so long as it was sufficiently difficult.

These led me to the rhyming dictionary and the over-poetical adjective, and the best productions of my melancholy muse were about as bad as the worst of Matthew Arnold. For the rest, my education left me an empty rather than an angry young man, with an indifference to religion, to self-discipline and to any authority, and a respect only for scholarship. Life has gently tempered the latter, but restored my ethical sense. I have a fascinated interest in even the wildest of heresies which will explain some aspect of apparent purpose, a liking for hierarchy in the government of men and an erratic sternness in government of myself.

At Oxford I turned to English Literature. When I had some success in my final schools, it is odd that it never once occurred to me to become some sort of literary man. My impatience for the life of commerce or action was quite certainly right, for, though I knew very well what words could be made to do, I had nothing whatever to put into them. Never was a youth more ignorant of the motives and emotions of his fellow human beings. Under a pretence of worldly wisdom too emphatic to be easily exposed, my conception of the world was unreal as that of a woman's weekly, and only in language more urbane. My own son at twelve was a far more satisfactory social animal than I at twenty.

Once in Roumania this waste ground of ignorance was filled as fast as a rubbish tip. Some pieces of it were levelled off, but of value only as playing fields. I became a tolerable and understanding companion for men; indeed the self of today would be delighted to be invited to dinner by the self of then. But to women I could give no companionship at all. Either I ignored them or I was intoxicated by the slight and enchanting physical differences between them and the very considerable physical difference from myself. Except for poems to girls—a more admirable subject for

the short lyric than nature study—I had nothing to write about and did not try.

It was at the age of twenty-nine, eager to achieve a financial independence which would allow me to follow Marina, that I first hurled myself at writing. By then I was familiar enough with Geoffrey Household to dislike him, and the mood of self-pity at least led to a deeper sympathy with my fellows. My working attitude towards them—my conception, that is, of reality—was solid enough to be put into the waiting words.

I chose the short story, going straight for the hardest form. I never even considered the novel. Whether I was merely impatient of its length or felt instinctively that I was not ready for such large responsibility I do not know. I am still inclined to think the novel an artless form—or at any rate a lot more artless than we practitioners like to claim.

It is curious that a man changes far more as a thinking and interested organism than he ever does as a craftsman. In those early stories, written in the brown and violet mausoleum of my Spanish flat or the clean pension bedroom which succeeded it, my aim was much as it is today though I could not have explained the target. Money was the driving force, yet I never attempted to tailor my stories to the requirements of the commercial magazine; on the other hand I could see no virtue in the self-conscious imitations of Chekhov and Katherine Mansfield which were the uncommercial fashion, and it seemed to me that the experimenters were all jammed together in a blind alley. Hemingway burst through the end of it taking the walls with him, but even if I had known the work of that magnificent artist I doubt if I should have admired it as I do now—an admiration well this side of idolatry, for I can seldom feel affection for his characters. They would be

easier company if the painful accidents so liable to affect their virility were permanent.

Those first stories of mine had no solidity at all. The beginning and the end might pass, but one led to the other through too undisciplined a middle. I was getting under the skin of my characters, not under that of any reader. One tale, I remember, was dressed with whole garlic cloves of Spanish dialogue to give it atmosphere. So, for me, it did; and if the reader were to find my atmosphere merely fog I did not care. In that I was closer than I believed to the school which esteemed fidelity of self-expression and little else. Whether you make the emotional interplay of your characters so obscure that the story means nothing unless verbally explained, or whether you lard it with blasphemies in foreign tongues, you have failed in the first demand of your craft: to make your meaning clear not only to your own literary set, but to a well-educated stockbroker. You are not entitled to assume that he is an amateur psychiatrist or that he speaks Spanish.

One of the tales found a market in the old *London Mercury*. I undid the wrapper, pleasurably anticipating the feeling of triumph which should caress the beginner at the first sight of himself in print. What actually I felt was more like the shock of a cripple, brought up among the beautiful and good, at the first sight of himself in a mirror. The images which at the time of writing had thronged into and out of my mind were not there. Of course they were not. One cannot distil the scent of a hyacinth and have the hyacinth itself. But I was not accustomed to the cruelty of print and unjustly disappointed.

The dead years in America passed and I was well into my thirties, still without a profession or the beachcomber's temperament which might have compensated for its absence. Hack writing had no bad effect, for there was no temptation to fall into the clichés and imprecise vocabulary

of the journalist, both inseparable from speed and flourishing in the first draft of every writer. The encyclopedia and the broadcasting plays were for children and demanded simplicity. So I did not form any vicious habits—except perhaps to condemn the whole literary craft because its more commercial practitioners seemed to obtain no satisfaction whatever to make up for the uncertainty of income.

By now life had equipped me well with experiences and fairly well with the power to relate one to another, so that my world, right or wrong, was a consistent whole. All which had been left out was content, and that was amply provided in my missionary journeys for John Kidd. When I returned to London from South America, I had little fear of not finding a reasonable living in the largeness of the world. I had no ambition, and it was late to look for one.

It may be that we cannot avoid fate—though I refuse to believe in so human and Old Baileyish a conception as Karma. But I see no reason at all why I should ever have become a craftsman if the managing director of John Kidd had not appointed a nephew of his to travel the Dominions instead of waiting for me to be free. The result was that when Europe and South America had been visited there was nowhere else for me to go.

The firm told me to hang on for six months, and meanwhile to call on the big London printers to whom their regular travellers had never been able to sell. Since I, no more than they, was permitted to offer bribes to the machine-minders I was not expected to bring in many new customers, nor required to give a close account of how I spent my time. When I felt that I had worked long enough at the impossible, I carried on negotiations for an agency to import Spanish wines. I also wrote *The Salvation of Pisco Gabar*, spreading the essence of Peru upon the foundation of a character who could have lived there but did not, and

of two stories of the high Andes which I had heard in the Argentine.

The typescript went off to America, whence some three weeks later a shower of gold and compliments descended upon me. The latter I accepted cautiously—not that I was to develop for another twenty years the self-protective armour of the writer against success and failure, but I could see no convincing reason for the effect of what I had done.

The Salvation of Pisco Gabar was quite unsaleable. It had no women in it; the end was strongly religious; its length was over twelve thousand words. That it should collect a jackpot after a mere six days in the office of Brandt & Brandt was due not to the cams of the commercial fruit machine but to the interplay of sympathetic personalities. Bernice Baumgarten gave it to Ted Weeks of *The Atlantic Monthly*, exacting a promise that he would read it on the train from New York to Boston. Ted recommended it to his editor-in-chief, Ellery Sedgwick, who took it, demanded more and offered to finance the writing of a novel. The wind was fair, and for once I did not try to sail against it.

It is perhaps forgivable that when a man has entered a new profession he should model his behaviour upon his own romantic idea of its practitioners. In December 1935 I went down to the South of Spain to start the novel, and rented a mill-house at Torremolinos, then happily unknown to the tourist agents. Indeed my house would have had little appeal to the motor-coach traveller. The terrace overlooked the club-house of the local fascists and was occasionally occupied by the militant left-wing whose armed leaders would politely knock at my door late at night and request permission to man the defences of the

Republic. Equally politely I would grant it, set out refreshments and go, or not, to bed.

I acquired an excellent old cook, and explored the local cellars for Montilla, which on its home ground I prefer to sherry. I had no patience with any Bohemianism where my belly was concerned, and I proposed to indulge the budding genius with rather more freedom than I should have allowed to the commercial traveller. I set up my typewriter upon the tiled terrace which overlooked the Mediterranean as well as the forces of reaction, and wrote the opening chapter of a novel which was to deal—though how I was far from clear—with the lives and thoughts of intelligent, but not necessarily educated outcasts bound together by a community of tastes.

And all was well, one would think. But when a man sets out to live a life unrestrained by the common conventions, he must expect the disorder also to be uncommon. Released from the respectability of the businessman, I proceeded to mismanage my life as loudly and eccentrically as some pot-careless squire of the eighteenth century. The unchristened novel, later to be *The Third Hour*, progressed little further than its opening. Emotional storm was responsible. Had I been more experienced, I should never have allowed it to shock me out of work, for production is less easily halted by distress than by the slightest fever or a late night. While I have always been able to do a long and satisfactory day's work in office or army with a hang-over, I cannot write at all. The life of a craftsman was leading me to moderation long before it was reinforced by advancing middle age.

I returned to London just before the Spanish Civil War broke out. I was strongly tempted to run away from domesticity and the difficulties of writing, and to join the Republicans; and yet was infuriated by the fact that volunteers were engaging themselves for the sake of Democracy

or Communism or some confounded panacea for the toiling masses, and not one of them for love of Spain. The democracy of Spaniards is so absolute that they do not need its more punctilious forms of political expression. Indeed, it would not work at all, either at home or in the Americas, if they had not brought the art of revolution to such a pitch of efficiency that it is quite as effective as a General Election and usually costs no more in lives.

Why, then, was I, holding these views, not for Franco rather than for the Republic? Above all, because I loved and pitied the individuals who made up Spain. I knew the ironworkers of Bilbao and the agricultural labourers of Andalusia. Courage and independence, nobility of manners, a pride that was unaggressive formed a proletariat so unproletarian that the very name was an insult. Yet they were treated with the full cruelty of early nineteenth-century economics. So long as poverty compelled them to work, nobody cared whether or not they ate. At least the Republic, with the Mexican example before it, was attempting legislation for the improvement of wages and working conditions.

I honoured the Republic, too, for its grant of regional autonomy to Catalonia and the Basque Provinces. I admit that this from a foreigner is impertinence. To the Castilian as to the Englishman regional autonomy has always seemed a betrayal of history, and he knows well that in a country of genial anarchists there must be a powerful brake on the centrifugal force. So I can only plead an emotional delight that the Basques had obtained their own republic, and an anger more personal than that of politically-minded demonstrators when Franco and German aircraft destroyed it.

With the indignation of the Republic against the Church I profoundly sympathised, though I am too unorthodox a Christian to claim the right of a protestant to be impatient.

The Church in Spain, with its willingness to use arms, its absorption of wealth, its political patronage and its idle mouths had to be reduced to the more reasonable proportions of the Church in France. That the prayers of the ascetic which perfume the still sky above Toledo should influence us all I can believe; for such intervention the forced fasting of a spiritually heroic people might be a small price to pay. But when paid for an inordinate host of the black-robed, multiplying like the black-coated in any mundane war, starvation is unacceptable.

Summer in London restored my equanimity, and slowly persuaded me that the Spanish quarrel was not clear enough for one who saw opposing political creeds in shades of grey, never in black and white. The novel, however, still stuck fast. Short stories for the ever-generous *Atlantic Monthly* just paid the butcher and the wine merchant, and several of them finished in Edward O'Brien's anthologies which in those days decided the top boys and girls of the year. But I have always distrusted the opinion of examiners. Their accolade gives me a spurious sense of triumph like that of the successful businessman who has outwitted the auditor. Meanwhile, Jack MacDougall on a visit to America heard of the new author and put up another advance. Honour forbade me any longer to tell myself that I was quite incapable of writing a novel.

We let the flat—always a useful source of income—and went down to a little guest-house at Beachley in the peninsula between Severn and Wye. There in the autumn garden, undisturbed and perhaps inspired by the Severn tides which foamed yellow up and down the narrows twenty yards away, I worked at a speed I have never approached since and at last came to know what in the world I was writing about. From Beachley we went on to Tangier. I hardly noticed the move. The world of imagi-

nation was dominant. In May 1937 the novel was finished after a year and a half of gestation.

There was enough material in *The Third Hour* for four novels—a common fault of beginners—and until war filled up the void I regretted that I had been so generous. For a first book it had a considerable *succès d'estime*, and it sold well enough to clear the advances and provide a few hundred pounds as well. The reviewers were kind to the story-telling but disliked the politics. The public took the politics far too seriously and the story-telling for granted. Those who loved the book still do, so that at least there must be a great richness of texture.

I was unconscious of any political preaching of my own. I had told the picaresque stories of several men and women from several nations, and shown their longing for some purpose greater than themselves which no religion or political creed could supply. To clear the ground for them I had to hold the illusions of capitalist, fascist and communist under a continual harassing fire of irony. Then I allowed the discontented to advance to their own purpose. My characters had the axe to grind, not I; and while I profoundly believed—as a novelist must—that for them the solution was right, I was not recommending monasteries of outlaws as a panacea for the ills of the nineteen-thirties.

With *The Third Hour* out of the way, I suffered from a financially alarming occupational hazard which has never left me and which I still refuse to accept as inevitable. I give myself a month or two of idleness and then sit down to another book. It opens magnificently; it proceeds to ten thousand words; it falters, and I suspect myself of laziness. I leave it alone and perhaps write a short story.

When I return to the manuscript of such high hopes I see at once that it faltered because the subconscious critic knew that it was poor, while the anxious author believed

that it was good. I start another, and exactly the same thing happens. I am working hard, although I cannot avoid the thought that I might as well be enjoying idleness. But if I do not work, how am I ever to produce a novel at all? And so the vicious circle continues until my daemon, who is as unsophisticated and indeterminate as a night-gowned guardian angel on a pious postcard, decides that the time has come to break it. No doubt he—or she—would come more intelligently to the rescue if I did not insist so strongly on being master of my fate.

Meeting for the first time this impotence I was appalled by it. In the autumn of 1937, with a mass of reading for a historical novel, we went to Portugal. The only result was a fine chapter in the middle of a non-existent book. Somehow an income of about six hundred a year was maintained. It sufficed for simple luxuries, and winters abroad were very cheap.

One day in December 1938 I wrote the opening pages of a novel—a habit of which I was growing very weary. But these seemed exciting, and eventually I let them go to the printer with hardly a change. To what incidents these pages were to lead I did not know, but the whole of the story was inherent in them, and *Rogue Male* began, week after week, to live. I observed, faintly protesting, that whereas I had intended a picaresque story in which Fear would supply the suspense, what I was really writing had some affinity to Buchan without his coincidences and with the cry of human suffering unsuppressed. But who was I to complain of inspiration? I could have wished the angel less prepossessed with violence, but if that was what it wanted I was prepared to place my craft at its disposal.

With those two first novels my laborious method of working became standardised, and through the years has only gained in slowness. I cannot think that I am a natural writer at all. To me it is a miracle that the great Vic-

torians should have been able to rise from work at mid-day—Trollope indeed at breakfast-time—with neat sheets of finished manuscript on desk or floor, demanding nothing more than correction in proof.

In pencil I drive a sort of pilot tunnel through the underground darkness of the imagination. This is by far the hardest work, and I never sit down to it with any real trust that it can be done at all. On a good morning the result is some three pages legible only to myself. In the evening I pass this inchoate mess through the typewriter, and it comes out with the action settled, speed about right, smoothness poor, and the paragraphs close to their final shape. A five-hour day, between morning and evening, will produce anything between seven hundred and a thousand words.

With at last the complete typescript in front of me, I retype the whole lot, modelling the characters nearer to their originals in life or imagination, strengthening the dialogue, and correcting the sentences so that any one of them can be read aloud without pain to tongue or ear. This retyping crawls at a rate of ten or twelve pages a day and, though exhausting, is at last capable of giving me pleasure. Stevenson said that the fun of writing is re-writing. I should go further, and claim that it is the only fun.

Rogue Male, years later, revealed to me the sort of conglomerate through which the pilot tunnel is driven. A favourite book of mine at the age of eight was Patterson's *Man-eaters of Tsavo*—strong meat for the young, but I was not more than pleasurably frightened by it. Possibly I lost my copy in the first term at a preparatory school. At any rate I never saw the book again until I reread it nearly forty years later after the war. Suddenly I was pulled up by a sentence which was nearly word for word in *Rogue Male*, and I soon found half a dozen fainter echoes. There

was no doubt about it. That was where my interest in Fear had come from. Yet today I should not rate Patterson's anatomy of terror very high—perhaps because in all literature which is not ephemeral the better drives out the good, and his lions are surpassed by Jim Corbett's tigers.

Whether the reception of *Rogue Male* was more than polite I have forgotten, for it was published in September 1939 when I had already left England. Certainly I felt a detached pleasure at a sheaf of press cuttings which reached me in Ploëști, but truth at that time seemed so much more provocative than fiction. Which, by any definition of the real, was nearer to reality I do not know. The attack upon the oil wells petered out into a dining club for diplomatic clerks. *Rogue Male* is still in the present.

Before it in England and after it in America came my first book of short stories, *The Salvation of Pisco Gabar*. I was uncritically in love with this, and a very mixed press permitted me to remain so; for every reviewer who singled out a story as particularly offensive, there was another who chose the same story as the best. Today I should rate the book as no more than promising, for several of the tales ran too close to the traditional smoking-room yarn—not that I despise the form, always provided that the characters are unconventional, the irony at least as important as the forthright action, and the cake from which the slice of life has been cut a living cake still extending in its own space before the beginning of the story and after its end. The man of letters who attacks the smoking-room yarn is in danger of finding *Heart of Darkness* undetected in the Congo to blow him clear out of the water.

In July 1945, when I called at the depot in Olympia and exchanged my uniform for a government suit and hat, the achievement of pre-war life—three books and a children's

story—was not enough to promise support for the four of us in the spirited life to which we were accustomed, though admittedly the babies had not been accustomed to it very long. But the war had packed me with self-confidence—a deal easier to attain when writing is in the future not the present—to which was added the encouragement of *The Atlantic Monthly*, expressed by immediate acceptance of three short stories and an advance of cash for a novel. There was also a film contract into details of which I will not go lest irony should change to invective and be roundly returned to me in the High Court by counsel for the plaintiffs. It would in any case be too savage dentistry upon a gift-horse which provided me with a large cheque when most I needed it.

The England to which we Middle-Eastern exiles returned was a foreign country. Its overpowering dullness shocked me even more than it did Ilona; for she, as a Hungarian, naturally expected the solid British culture to be somewhat lacking in vitality. The whole people seemed to be living to the motto of their ration books: *do nothing until told*; and the impression of those of us who had been away five or six years was exactly that of a Capitalist tourist entering a Communist state. Discipline might pass, as the price of victory; but I resented having to pay it for political experiment. The Army, which I had always felt to be the very ideal of Socialism in its willing and common surrender to a common cause, was a far more friendly and less pompous organisation than the State.

Since the individual and his free development are precious to me, I loathe the State control which is inseparable from Socialism. Yet if I were a citizen of an undeveloped peasant country, where the individual has hitherto had no chance of development, I should certainly support a strong, centralised, Socialist Government. In China, for example, I might be a Communist. But in France I should

be a Monarchist; in Spain, a Liberal. For my own country, where the tendency of the State to sweep up all untidy ends of liberty must be continually checked, I am probably an anarchist.

In argument with politicians I am always beaten. I cannot express what I believe, whereas they express what they cannot possibly believe. But in the last two years I have modified the contempt with which, in thought and in fiction, I treated the man whose sole qualification to represent the people was the mouthing of what they wanted to hear.

The most unexpected experience which ever happened to me, far surpassing the curiosities of South America and war (since they were in the pattern of my life) was to be elected a borough councillor. No one else could be found to stand. I agreed—for there was I complaining at being tied to the creatures of my imagination, and here was a chance of evenings in a world of action, however mild—and since I was certainly not a Socialist, I permitted myself to be called Conservative.

The administration I enjoyed; the politics bored me, for there is no need of them in the running of a borough. Press and public, however, like the council chamber to be a cheap and inaccurate debating hall, and it is the democratic duty of councillors to satisfy them—a fairly harmless duty since all the work has already been done in the committees where politics rarely intrude and every question is patiently considered on its merits. I can think of no better way to run local government than through unpaid, conscientious citizens who make the job their hobby.

As a civic dignitary I was only an amused and competent actor, but the service did teach me that in deriding Members of Parliament I had been attacking the wrong men. The whole basis of politics is the hard-working,

unintelligent worker in the ward whose enthusiasm is kept alive by what he or she wrongly believes to be the principles and practical intentions of the opposite party. Their opinions and their tastes are reflected in the executive committees. A coven of retired grocers and colonel's wives, savagely anti-Socialist, an unseemly chapel of plumbers and female civil servants, savagely anti-Conservative, choose the candidate, distort policy, bombard their leaders in Parliament with telegrams of protest when they have been courageous, and of congratulation when they have sacrificed national to party interest. Even so, they sometimes fail to impress their prejudices upon an unwilling House of Commons; and the elected politicians, whom all my life I have blamed for ignorance and insincerity, should really be honoured as the barrier between their executive committees and national disaster. All must be forgiven to the Member, for he alone protects us from the full effects of democracy.

But in 1945 I could see only that the politicians had no desire to dispel the queues which ended at their feet. The family emigrated from London to remotest Devon and bought a house. Its position at the head of a creek off the Salcombe Estuary would have haunted the mind of any holiday-maker until he could return; but to civilised man and woman, living there all the year round without paid labour—or, worse, with it—the place had nothing to offer but unlimited rabbits and eggs. House agents would have advertised it as 'suitable for artist or writer'—though why they should assume that such fastidious professionals will tolerate more discomfort than their fellows I have never understood. More likely to live upon a beauty of surroundings is the man who cannot create it for himself.

Production was low, and if we had not sold the house at a profit, the effect of idleness would have been more

obvious than it was. The independent craftsman is compelled in self-protection to close his eyes to the threat of disaster lest he be over-influenced by it; and that optimism which appears irresponsible to an accountant or an Income Tax Inspector is in fact as essential as the guard-rail upon some malevolent machine. It can be removed for intervals of care and maintenance, but if it is not in place during the working year alarm inhibits or diverts the hand.

The next move was to a rented house near Dorchester of enormous size and such generous ugliness that one could feel for it nothing but affection—an affection in my case redoubled because there my beloved Magyar first began to be fascinated by England and the English. All the time I was conscious of that heaven, the mutual love of a close-knit family, which is taken for granted by most men and women of goodwill, and for me was an undeserved reward surpassing the most exotic pleasures and excitements.

Almost immediately I found that disconnected chapters fell into place, and that I was half-way through *Arabesque*. It was an uneven novel—for in the eight years since *Rogue Male* my taste had declined through lack of reading as much as lack of writing—into which I poured the essence of my Middle-Eastern experience. And this time I did have an axe to grind. I was infuriated by American ignorance of Palestine and the incompetence of our own official propaganda. I set out to show the Arab-Jewish problem from the neutral army point of view. It was a fair objective, since I understood Palestine better than all but a few specialists and could express what I knew more cunningly than they.

In America, well reviewed and accepted as fair comment, it was the most profitable of all my books. In England it died still-born—and this at a moment when Palestine was topical and even the opinions of politicians were saleable. Those were the days when newspapers had

little space for reviews or for advertisements, and it was hard to get a book noticed at all unless it was by an established writer. My publishers of that time assumed that I was. They had forgotten that eight absorbing years had passed since *Rogue Male*. My name was completely unknown except to the Intelligence Corps, whose purchases probably accounted for the few copies which were sold.

I doubt if a writer is ever entitled to blame his publisher for low sales. Serious publishers are not salesmen, and do not claim to be. In England they differ only in their tastes; and what passionately interests them is the making of books, not of money. For books in general they will do any amount of propaganda. Book clubs, press campaigns, literary societies for old ladies—the publisher loves them all. But salesmanship appals him, and he is unwilling to earn the dislike of his equally gentlemanly competitors by lunching once a week in large provincial cities with his travellers and once a month with the director of an unscrupulous advertising agency. Were it his necessity to sell bananas in Spain, he would expect to do so by commissioning a series of evening-paper articles on the superiority of the Banana to the Grape.

It is inevitable that the publisher should have a split personality, divided between his love of literature and his desire to make a living. Frustrated as a mother, he is determined to be a midwife, and his taste, patience and humanity generally make him a good one. But the tough commercialism of which he is unjustly accused is limited to snatching with perfectly sincere regret the odd half-crown from printer and author, and to the search for the rainbow gold of the best-seller. When threatened by imminent bankruptcy, he puts his prices up instead of down, ignoring the fact that no ordinary member of the public ever buys a book unless it is paper-covered. Publishers know this but they do not believe it. My father, for

example, knew that policemen could be bribed, but he did not believe it.

Thanks to American sales, the failure of the English *Arabesque* was not disastrous, but it was a shock to find that I had to go back to the bottom of the literary snakes and ladders and start again. The result was that I strained for effect. I put an extra polish on style and made the next book carry all the assets I had—a setting both romantic and true, characters from Syria and Spain and half Europe, and what should have been a dark stream of excitement gathering in the mountain waters until it rushed headlong for the fall. But the fall was my own. I attained a blank failure. Since I was by no means flown with insolence—unless it were a Disraeli-like insolence of over-embroidering my waistcoat and insisting that I be heard—the fates were unkind.

I must be content with having aimed *The High Place* at the sun and lost the arrow without even knowing whether it cleared the nearest bush. The novel was set on the Syrian frontier, and concerned a colony of anarchists who had reached the logical conclusion that only a third world war could bring about the desired abolition of the State. Since I was writing in 1948 and alarmed by the steady growth of State dictatorship in England, I had only to exaggerate my own resentment in order to create a hero and narrator who should be deeply involved in the anarchists' plot until he discovered that their intention was not merely to take advantage of war but to cause it. Yet I fear their trigger device, though scientifically correct, was unconvincing. Indeed, I was later told by an experienced diplomat that the provocative language used to each other at international conferences by Russians and Americans was already so bad that no drugged cigar could possibly make it any worse.

Still, that might have passed. So might my study of the

Russian, the Spanish and the religious aspects of anarchism, all contributing with a reasonable economy of words to the final tragedy. Where, I think, I failed was in breaking my own rule. I did not make my meaning clear to the well-educated stockbroker.

I hid a story within the story. I was, and am attracted by the Manichean heresy. I suspect that the battle between Good and Evil is unending, and that the triumph of Good on this planet of earth is not certain. Whether it is certain in a more universal purpose we cannot know, since the terms good and evil are relative only to human conduct and meaningless in any other context. We have no ready reckoner to tell us whether any course of action will cause more human suffering or less; therefore we can only follow the dictates of conscience, and hope to heaven that it has a purpose. More we cannot claim for it, since conscience may lead us—as it did Elisa Cantemir in the novel—to what by any human standard is intolerable evil. Thus Evil must be the servant of the ultimate purpose no less than Good, and we are possessed by one or the other.

Into this myth of dualism I fitted my characters. The servant of Ahriman was Elisa Cantemir; the servant of Ahuramazda, Anton Tabas. Oliver Poss, an international spiv with a Greek passport standing apart from the conflict, was a wholly amoral Pan. Eric Amberson, the hero and narrator, represented the Mithras who must be sacrificed for humanity; but since, like a chief witch of the old religion, he was only too willing to give up his life, the harder sacrifice of love, happiness and self-respect was demanded from him.

Now, all this should not have been in the least apparent in the book, since Amberson himself was telling the story and unaware that he and the antagonists were playing their parts on two stages, one human and one divine. I used every conjuring trick of technique so that the religious

dualism should pass clear over the heads of those for whom it meant nothing, and add a pleasure for any reader who picked up the symbolism. But the result was to leave in the air a vague and unsatisfactory sense of the supernatural, which was of course disastrous; and I never realised its presence until some contemptuous reviewer, intending to be unkind but blessedly revealing what was wrong, compared Elisa Cantemir to Rider Haggard's She. As I had conceived her, Elisa was a passionate but unfeminine political maniac and the last person in all fiction likely to go up in smoke.

Even the rogues of Defoe cannot leave religion alone. This mounting uninvited into a too mysterious pulpit obliges me to satisfy curiosity and to answer the question of what I do believe. When I was in my twenties, dining in Bucharest with that liberal Byzantine, Canon Douglas, he told me that all my rag-bag of speculations could honestly be contained within the Church of England. It may be so, but I have to employ some far-fetched allegories before I can repeat the Creed. I am no more troubled by miracles than the centurion of Capernaum; and indeed I do not think that physicist and biochemist are now very far from explaining in their meaningless but useful words the source of power. I accept the Doctrine of the Trinity as a clear and magnificent definition of Godhead. Yet I cannot believe that any one of the great religions is less true than another.

They provide maps, and the individual soul is wise to choose that which is most familiar to him, whether a Roman road map which shows the day's march as straight whatever the points of the compass, or the coloured inch-to-the-mile of the Hindu, or the child's atlas which I myself prefer wherein detail is inadequate and unimportant, and the general picture clear. Since I am not yet weary of this life, I hate the thought of dying; but I am

certain that when dead I am the earning of Life will be a harder and more intellectually adventurous task than the earning of a living, and that when the map is no longer two-dimensional I shall need all the self-discipline and knowledge which I have been able to acquire and the grace, which I have not deserved, of the Second Person of the Trinity, by whatever name He be called, if I am to find my way among the dreams.

The failure of *The High Place* reminded me that I had not yet reached the age of contemplation when it is permissible to promulgate heresies, and that my immediate duty was to support a family. A year's work had brought in no income—proof, at any rate, that it was honest.

The obvious way of recovery was to write some fast-moving story of unlikely adventure. Speed, I knew, was one of my gifts—in spite of the laborious slowness with which the illusion is produced—and I was constantly being exhorted to write another *Rogue Male*. But I cannot analyse myself well enough to imitate myself. So I plunged for pure speed and imagination, and produced a commercial thriller called *A Rough Shoot* in the hope of selling it as a serial in America. In its genre I am not wholly ashamed of it, but the difference between this story and *Rogue Male* is the difference between cast iron and wrought.

A Rough Shoot was bought by the *Saturday Evening Post* as a serial, and also made into a film—a very bad one. Almost simultaneously the *Post* took the finest of all my long short stories, *Three Kings*, so that I had more money in the bank than I ever had before or since. The first sale merely proved that my calculation was right, the second that my craftsmanship was triumphant. In one I had pleased the market; in the other I had pleased myself, but needed the confirmation of the market that my taste was not purely personal. There is no artificiality in the distinction.

I have never been sure whether any story would sell or not, for my subjects are always unusual. If, in spite of the oddness, an experienced editor considers the story fit for mass reading, then there is every chance that I have hit my target. I may, of course, have fallen unconsciously into commercialism, but that is improbable unless I am playing with some entertaining fantasy without any undertones at all.

Johnson declared that no man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money. What I think he meant to express—though one should not study too closely all the mushroom cloud from a Johnsonian bomb—was his detestation of the amateur for whom it was enough to have written at all. It would be fair to present the problem thus: if you cannot live by your writing, the translation into words of your own manner of thinking cannot be effective, for your whole aim and object is to be so compellingly good that the maximum number of people, whether they approve or not, will have to pay money to read you. The market is the ultimate test for the craftsman. That it should also be the first and only test for the hack is unimportant.

I had no intention whatever of allowing *A Rough Shoot* to be published as a book, for I thought it too slight and ephemeral. The literary scholar of thirty-five years ago is still alive enough in me to be exasperatingly contemptuous of the mere story-teller. But weakly, and at last, I gave way to the insistence of my American and English publishers. *A Rough Shoot* was only forty thousand words, half the length of a novel, so I decided to write a sequel with the same hero and narrator and more true to life in that we would inspect the jolly schoolboyish character when he was overcome by darkness, defeat and revenge. *A Time to Kill* was meant to appear in one volume with *A Rough Shoot*—a story of attack followed by one of defence.

But publishers dispose. Readers, they said—and they

said it on both sides of the Atlantic—would not stand two stories in one volume. I do not know why. Personally I prefer to have eighty thousand words for my twelve and sixpence. Again I gave way—with the result that I was typed as a thriller writer, and not a very good one at that. My only sour satisfaction was that the public would have little to do with either book until offered as a paper-back, thereby proving that its business sense was as good as my own.

I set both stories in Dorset because I wished my characters to be free of foot, and I have no liking for description of the open north where the thermometer insists it is not cold though nothing but whisky will allay the discomfort of continual shivering. The western end of the chalk, not too closely populated, suits the mood of loneliness. Man on the short turf is apart from his fellows, and in a sense predatory upon them, since for his food and drink he must descend below the tree-tops. Meanwhile he may stand back from an England which, half-way to the horizon, recovers her youth and appears again a forest—ecstatic, as a man standing back from his beloved, that a beauty which was all of feeling is also a beauty to be seen. I delighted to draw the setting of *A Rough Shoot* from the four hundred acres of high farmland where I myself shared a shoot, though I could not allow to my narrator, who was a plain, provincial businessman, more poetry of description than would be in character.

A writer explaining how he deals with his subjects is almost bound to fall into excesses of conceit and humility. They are both so necessary to him. Lacking conceit, he would stop trying for the better; lacking humility, he would not know what the better was. More entertaining and just as relevant is to explain why he is drawn to his

subjects at all, for that at once becomes the story of those thoughtless and happy hours when the raw material of writing is fed into the unconscious. If poetry be emotion recollected in tranquillity, much prose has as its origin tranquillity recollected with emotion.

To shoot for the pot has always refreshed me, combining my love of open country with the more urbane anticipation of a future meal. But, though a competent shot with rifle and pistol, I have never been more than a comedy figure with a gun. Anything which flies or runs—so long as it does—is reasonably safe from me. Occasional lessons have only driven my teachers to despair, for I am not even consistent in error. I may be under or over or peppering the next parish.

The beginning of my sporting activity was as fraudulent as the rest of it. When I was at Oxford I was employed one summer to be a good and healthy influence upon a thirteen-year-old boy. The job called out a temporary sense of responsibility, and a self which was then unknown to me did it well; possibly I remembered the dreaming happiness of my own boyhood before 1914, and was determined to preserve it in another. This charming boy was expected to learn to shoot, and I to encourage him in the art. Day after day the gamekeeper hurled chunks of pottery into the air for us. Invariably the boy hit them, and I missed them; on the other hand, I enjoyed it, and he did not. So we came to a gentlemen's agreement under which I should shoot the rabbits while he entertained himself as he pleased. The rabbits on that Somerset estate looked as if they had been bred by a circus conjurer. Some were black, some red as a fox, and some, fathered by liberal-minded, rabbit-coloured rabbits, were tortoiseshell.

Returning to October Oxford I could now claim, in a casual manner, to be able to shoot; and Ivor Barry invited

me from time to time to annoy his father's pheasants. Thus I qualified for a future banker—not, of course, by reason of my prowess, but possibly because I knew all the correct gestures. They were almost in my blood, for when I was a very little boy I would make my father tell me bedtime stories of the shooting at Bilney in Norfolk and the game-keeper and the local characters.

In Roumania one of the many saints of the Orthodox Church would sometimes close the bank long enough for a night and a day in the silent Danube marshes. I loved the morning flight for its unearthliness, its change, marked as that between waking and sleeping thoughts, from the city of men to the city of the birds. Closely following a peasant guide through darkness so black that there was no gleam of water, I arrived at nowhere and squatted in a waist-deep pit. Heralding the morning flight, teal bulleted overhead in twos and threes, their bodies just blacker than the night. Out of the grey came the grey geese, and after them, when the water was silver and the points of the rushes black against sunrise, the squadrons of the duck. Then the sun rose, and far away I could see the frontier of willows separating the sown from the desert of water in which no man lived but an occasional outlaw. One such, arriving with infinite precautions, I met at a peasant wedding. He was the local hero, and the bride's father was greatly honoured that he should have taken such a risk. The man was all misery and wet hair, his sheepskin cloak rotting with mud, and his person a biblical comment upon the fruits of murder.

The feathered arrows of the half light were nearly always too fast for a slow arm encumbered by clothes; but warmed and after breakfast I was tireless in the pursuit of snipe, caring greatly for my dinner and less for the sporting dogma that he must be shot because he is the hardest bird to shoot. To my palate the snipe surpasses the woodcock,

always provided that he is free from a faintly fishy tang and has never seen a shop counter.

The evening flights of September—since I do not mind leaches but I cannot stand cold—were much to my taste, and once in my life have I known what the first-class shot must feel. My companions were laid up with fever, due either to mosquitoes or a surfeit of water-melons, and I strolled out through the dusk along the top of a flood bank with no cover at all. The duck, confident that no one would ever attempt to shoot them from so improbable a position, committed suicide upon the end of my gun until it was too hot to hold. I could scarcely carry my bag, especially since I had to cover a quarter of a mile backwards facing the dogs of a gipsy encampment. They set great store by the useless beasts, and it would have been unwise to kill.

Once I shot in the Dobrudja, where the tumuli of the dead cover the steppe like ants' nests—perhaps a Scythian cemetery with room for twenty cemeteries between one grave and another, perhaps the last record of Darius' expedition while there was still leisure to bury the dead before the onset of starvation and empty wandering. Beyond this nomad's paradise and close to what then was the Bulgarian frontier, high vegetation begins again. There we came to two great hedges, thicker than even an abandoned Dorset hedge, which enclosed nothing and seemed evidence of human intention rather than accomplishment. Over each hedge was a peregrine falcon. The tiercel and his mate had worked out a technique which proved that they were killing as much for sport as for hunger. The falcon would glide low along the foot of her hedge where partridges were cowering. Up would get the covey and fly across to the second hedge. Just before they arrived, the tiercel would strike, bagging one or missing. He then patrolled his own hedge until the partridges lost their

nerve again and were driven back to the falcon. We four guns were in the middle of this fascinating game. We did occasionally drop a bird out of the covey, but for the most part the peregrines worked like a pair of ill-trained gun-dogs, a hundred yards ahead of us.

In the years which followed Roumania my mind, enterprising in all but relaxation, paced the cage which I had made for it, and I never touched a gun until my return at the beginning of the war. Again there were morning and evening flights on the Danube marshes, and sometimes long tramps over the open plain—ten or more guns, with a hundred paces between them, walking mile after mile across the sunburnt stubble and fallow. Game got up so far away that full choke in both barrels was recommendable, and I was completely outclassed by the Roumanians, who were a people of keen shots with a strict and admirable code of game laws.

In the Lebanon my ex-gamekeeper sergeant-major and I were bound together by a community of tastes which once exposed us to the delight and derision of two sections. We were about to start one of our pistol-shooting matches. The target was being nailed up when he and I simultaneously spotted a snipe. We fell upon our bellies and crawled in its direction. To have killed a snipe with a .45 revolver would be a memory for ever. Twenty-six pairs of eyes watched us with amazement, for nothing less than a German spy bogged from his parachute could account for this lunatic behaviour. We fired together at nothing visible. None of them connected our slow and skilful stalk with the little brown bird which rose and obligingly settled again. Once more we got within twenty yards and fired. This time one of us must have been very close, for the snipe disappeared towards High Lebanon, producing every jink and trick in its repertoire. We returned and explained ourselves. But the word 'snipe' carried little

magic for those highly intelligent townsmen. We might as well have said it was a sparrow.

Snipe and Sheikh Fouad Douaihy persuaded us to explore a melancholy bog on the flats to the north of Tripoli. I put up nothing but a venerable hare. Each of us was taken aback at finding the other in so unlikely a spot, and his astonishment lasted a fatal second longer than my own. Sheikh Fouad was enchanted at this success, and nothing would content him but that we should drive some miles to a village station on the Tripoli-Aleppo line and eat the hare with a cousin—there was nowhere he did not have a cousin—who was the stationmaster.

The stationmaster was naturally unprepared for such an invasion. He was a bachelor and lived in a room above the ticket-office, approached by a wooden step-ladder. Sheikh Fouad, however, appeared to have no doubt that he could cook a hare. I cannot even guess at his motives. He may have wished to assure this outlying member of his clan, who possibly was in trouble with his superiors, that he, Fouad, was on excellent terms with the British Army and could fix anything; or he may have known that the man had not had a square meal for weeks. Alternatively—and this is the more likely—he merely wished to give the lonely stationmaster an opportunity to entertain within his means the head of the clan.

It was seven o'clock and we were ravenously hungry. The solitary porter was sent off into the night to buy herbs and wine. The stationmaster climbed to his bedroom with the hare. We three sat upon the hard benches of the ticket-office, drinking araq to keep out the draughts which howled through the wooden walls. After an hour and a half the porter returned. By then the sergeant-major and I were owlish with araq on empty stomachs, but still keeping up our party manners.

Now fortified by bread and wine, I asked for a situation

report on the hare. Sheikh Fouad explained that the stationmaster had only a frying pan and a primus stove. His tone gently rebuked my curiosity. A gentleman should not enquire too closely into the manner in which other gentlemen chose to live.

Nine passed, and ten. At half-past ten Fouad, for the first time in all our months of friendship, showed impatience. The stationmaster came tumbling down the ladder and announced that certainly we could eat the hare if we wished, but though a magnificent hare—a better hare, more exquisitely shot, there could not be in all Syria!—its extreme age deserved respect and another half-hour of cooking.

At eleven, the stationmaster descended the ladder, holding his wash-basin in his arms. Within it, smoking among olives and onions, was the hare. It was delicious, resembling hare *à la Grecque*, but not so oily. How he managed it I cannot conceive, although he had infinite time, the head of his clan to entertain and the native Lebanese genius for cooking. Wine and congratulations flowed. Sheikh Fouad beamed, as if he had known all along that his improbable impulse would be justified.

There were warm and idle evening flights in the Valley of Jezreel, the marshes of Lake Hula and the waters of Jericho. Once, staying at a kibutz on the Syrian frontier, I had a marvellous early morning after quail which lay so close that even I could not miss them, and once I spent two days in the tamarisk jungle along the banks of the lower Jordan after invisible pig. So back to Devon and Dorset, where my skill was just sufficient to keep a meatless and growing family supplied with rabbits—by no means a dull diet, for they were in such quantity upon the down of *A Rough Shoot* that there was no difficulty in picking the right age for frying, for grilling, for roasting or—should a

parent intercept what was intended for its children—for goulash and rabbit loaf.

A curious disadvantage of the writer's life is that he is not compelled to live anywhere in particular. He is commonly envied for this freedom, yet to handle it a man must either be unenterprising or have a great love for his chosen spot. Those impulses which quickly come to nothing because the breadwinner must live near his work may be too freely indulged.

In 1949 Ilona and I held a family council. Our unity in Europe makes us approach most subjects from the same direction and with the same assumptions—though I, the cold Englishman, am noisy and emphatic, and she, the excitable Hungarian, is patient and courteous. We decided that we lived too far from London, that we needed more friends, that the business would prosper if production were closer to the market. The first and third reasons were nonsense. The second was true enough, since my own friends were far too scattered over the world, and a woman who marries a foreigner is deprived of her right to contribute to marriage, except at rare intervals, her own circle of intimates and relations.

We bought a cottage at Strand-on-the-Green and had it converted to a house during six months of violently rising building costs. At least as many of my fellow citizens have been ruined by architects as by the Law or the Stock Exchange, for once the work has started there is no point at which you can get out, sell and cut your losses. But it is not fair to put the blame on the architect. He is employed to create a thing of beauty, and he would be an unlikely paragon among men if he were also an accountant. At least we added to London a house slight and decorative as

a good essay, and probably—though the builders had to scamp the job here and there—more lasting.

Now loaded with debt in the traditional manner of writers and actors, yet innocent of any extravagance, I tried to double my sale of short stories and failed. I discovered that the deliberate invention of one tale after another was beyond my powers. There was no obvious reason why this should be, for several of my most profitable stories have been built of pure imagination; but they are freaks, mere isolated efforts of the guardian angel to impress me with its industry. What I myself require for a short story invariably comes—if it is not a memory of my own—from the casual conversation of other people. It may be a single phrase, or some account of the oddity of a friend or an anecdote. The only essential is that what I hear should amuse my sense of irony. It is a good year when imagination is set alight more than twice. My made short stories, therefore, lacked the true and urgent flame, and as little first-class work came out of the spurt of energy as if I had waited for my subjects and made no spurt at all.

Enough stories had now satisfied magazine editors and myself for me to insist that both my publishers should publish. They could only agree, hoping to make up their losses on a later book. They were rewarded for uncommercial kindness by no loss at all, for they sold their editions of *Tales of Adventurers* down to the last copy.

This is the book by which I should wish to be judged, since it could not possibly have been written by anyone else. Original work, upon which he need not even put his name or trade-mark, is all that any craftsman can claim. How far it is aesthetically pleasing he cannot know, for the eye of affection forgives too much.

Reviewers in both countries were uncommonly kind. The only charge they preferred against me, and that mildly, was of searching out and elaborating the exotic. It

is true that I often take my subjects from war or very foreign parts or Iron Curtain politics or any situation which will allow me to show individual man and woman in direct relationship—that is to say, with no protection but their own character or integrity—to unfamiliar circumstance. It is all a question of taste, and my defence is that I try to write what I like to read.

The delicate story founded upon one single subtlety of human character is rarely for me. The analysis may be brilliant and moving, but the fact analysed is a commonplace which I know already. My temperament demands that it should be presented to me as an epigram of four lines, not a short story of two hundred. I would agree that much of the finest literature merely gives new life to the familiar, and that the great play or novel gathers up in its sweep the fairly ordinary actions of fairly ordinary people. But the short story does not march to that slow and magnificent time. It is a little dance of bees, pointing direction. And if there is no new flower when I arrive there, I may be fascinated as a craftsman, but as a reader I am bored.

It is, of course, the even greater boredom of the commercial short story which has frightened honest men and women into writing with the false simplicity of Wordsworth on an off day. Even so, it is not always desirable to use a sow's ear to make a silken purse. Between the commercial story and the stuff with a full-stop every dozen words, there is still infinite room for experiment.

Because I was for so long an amused, romantic, ironical observer of men and manners between Persia and the Pacific coast, it was natural that, when I turned from living life to imagining it, I should be attracted by the same sort of incident in fiction as in reality. What I see as a short story worth writing is more likely to happen abroad than in England; and when it does happen at home, England presents itself to me as a European country

of great individuality and I am conscious of its frontiers. To a lesser extent this is also true of my novels. I cannot get away from the interaction between my country and its world.

What masters I follow I cannot analyse. I suspect that Conrad has some influence, and, the moment I write fiction in the first person, Defoe. There must also be echoes from the French and the Spaniards, for they are the story-tellers whom I most frequently re-read. But my most conscious loyalty is to the English language, and one of the reasons for my slowness is humility. I hesitate to accept my ephemeral thoughts as meriting the precise expression which I admire. In spite of mass literature I do not believe that English has yet entered so late silver an era that it should be necessary to over-simplify it or over-elaborate. The style of Hemingway's imitators gets in my way as a reader just as annoyingly as does that of Walter Pater, and I resent that anyone should make love to my language with perversities until all the delicious ingeniousness upon the border of convention has been exhausted. To my taste, the finest English prose of our day is Osbert Sitwell's, straightforward to read and discreetly decorated. I question whether the future historian, comparing him to the masters of the two previous centuries, will find any marked decadence.

Tale of Adventurers was followed by the usual year or two of searching for a subject which would keep up the standard of the short stories and save me from a run before the wind with some confounded fellow meditating improbable violence. Meanwhile I turned to and enjoyed a few months of hack work, honest as that of any chairmaker who will ring the door-bell for repairs rather than produce imitation Louis XV. It was indeed a thriller, but it was true. I rewrote for children the *Anabasis* of Xenophon—and with a proper enthusiasm for the original author, since I myself

had been over the route as far as the Kurdish mountains and I had suspected at the age of thirteen that the retreat of the ten thousand must be good reading if only one could get away from the aorist, the parasangs and the Persians with unpronounceable names.

Rather more gradually than usual my angel presented to me a faint outline of *Fellow Passenger*. I liked it, and took over. I was weary of the melancholy confessions of ex-communists, and it seemed to me that any of the fiery young men whom I had known in the early nineteen-thirties—when a lad of generous spirit was no more to blame for catching Communism than any other intimate disease—would be far more ready to laugh at himself than to beat a dreary breast with Germanic polysyllables. And Communism itself is so gloriously inefficient—the indestructible genius of the Russians continues in spite and not because of their official creed—that I can never fear it, as I did Hitler, to the point of hysteria. Among its infinite tragedies there is a gleam of comedy which Cervantes would have enjoyed—that of fallible human beings striving towards a very ancient, noble and impractical ideal by means that are preposterous to any but themselves.

In the writing of the book I was for once very near to pleasure, and those who liked it forgave the performance of acrobatics upon the very brink of fantasy for the sake of the high spirits. It did fairly well, and for the first time my English sales far surpassed the American. Across the Atlantic they were a little shocked at my cavalier treatment of the treasured bedtime bogeyman.

I was eager that the public should take to this book just sufficiently to allow me to move over into the territory of the English and Spanish picaresque. *Fellow Passenger* was already in the tradition—far nearer, say, to Defoe than to Buchan. There was no violence, but enough speed to

persuade the reader who only took me out of the library for excitement that he had had his twopence worth. The narrator, too, belonged in the class of rogues rather than rogue males, and his character allowed him to tell his story with such irreverence as I chose to give him.

I have always had a strong preference for throwing a story into the first person. Through entering the mind of too many characters clarity is diffused, and the novelist finds himself commenting and explaining when he should be recording. The narrator may be the hero, or he may be an intelligent observer. On the whole I have a liking for the first in a novel, and the second in a short story. But, from the moment the word 'I' is on the paper, speech, thoughts, what the narrator may see, what he implies and what he suppresses are his, as absolutely as in a play, and no longer the writer's. Somerset Maugham's insistence that the 'I' must be himself forces him into too arch a modesty—for he cannot claim for himself all he might claim for a Marlowe—with the result that the apologies and dinner parties of the first pages go on too long. That, I think, is the only reason why this superb master of the short story will never be as popular with the critical as he is, and rightly, with the fireside reader.

When I wrote *The Third Hour* I was joyously ignorant that there was any problem at all to be solved in the use of the third person. Fortunately the bulk and vitality of a first novel swamped any awkwardness which there might have been in the transitions between the mind of one character and of another. In *Arabesque*, again in the third person, I was too conscious of the difficulty and fussy as a vicar's wife experimenting with chrysanthemums upon the pulpit steps. I compromised by allowing action to be seen only through the eyes and in the presence of hero and heroine; and when I needed one short and satirical chapter in which neither of them could be present I set it as a

division in the middle of the book and called it 'Interlude.'

The use of the first person at once does away with the problem of whether the novelist and the readers may know more than the characters and, if so, how much. But it substitutes two other troubles. The first is the reason why the narrator should tell his story at all. I am sure it is unnecessary to answer this question, and I tell myself that I am not going to bother with it; yet every time I feel a lack of urgent reality until I have bothered with it. The second trouble is style. The narrator may—indeed must—use basic Geoffrey Household, but upon that he may only embroider within the limitations of his character and his probable powers of self-expression. The limit of realism is quickly reached. For example, I could not allow a Civil Servant to tell his tale in Civil Service English. But sometimes in a short story I will let the English read as if it were a translation from a foreign language—a most dangerous *tour de force*, for the pitfall of the comic foreigner yawns wide open.

The narrator of *Rogue Male* was a highly educated man, packed with class traditions and suppressions. He was fully capable of thinking anything I could think, but the words had to be dragged out of him. He would never have admitted his sufferings to any but himself, and his suppressions are also for himself. In fact he was using the conventions of the diary. There was no room for any fireworks. The ornaments of language had to be confined to simple flashes of agony.

To Eric Amberson in *The High Place* I could allow far more fluency. The consciousness of his personal tragedy working upon a man who had all the sensitivity of a frustrated craftsman gave him the right to let himself go and to construct sentence and paragraph as well as his creator could manage. *A Rough Shoot*, however, was too easy to give much aesthetic pleasure, for it was told by a

plain Dorset businessman. To him language was a vehicle for facts; in the realms of the spirit he would be as incoherent as the rest of us. I could not write the complex, commercial-letter sort of English which he would in life have written—once in the naughtiness of an after-dinner mood I tried it, and ten pages would have been enough for any reader—but the nearer I held him to basic, the more real he would be and the faster the story would go.

The hero of *Fellow Passenger* was a man after my own heart. Half English, half Ecuadorian, he could look at our manners from the outside and enjoy them. There was no limit except that set by propriety—mine, not his—on what he might think and what he might do; and when he loved the beauty of woman or landscape or wine, his dancing style could fairly be allowed to sparkle with appreciation.

Fellow Passenger did what I asked of it, setting me free to move towards the pure picaresque with reasonable certainty that I would not also be moving to bankruptcy. On the plane of daily life I was also more at ease, for we had got rid of that dainty and ruinous mistress, the Strand-on-the-Green house, without a loss. All was set fair for leisurely story-telling.

But the angel was in her most feminine avatar. She would have nothing to do with this simple, virile and practical programme; nor would industrious persuasion move her, for the picaresque is not so simple as it appears. An original character will, it is true, stroll through the imagination with all necessary impudence; and, once he is established, his adventures, his loves and the shape of the society upon which or in spite of which he lives may be invented with generous ease. The element of suspense which must carry the reader through to the end is far more troublesome to discover and develop. It may be danger, but then the story runs too close to the thriller. It may be,

as in *Tom Jones*, the course of true love. But my characters are never creatures of social convention; I could not outrage probability by keeping them out of bed until the end of the book.

I tried a political motive to give me suspense and set my scene in the Balkans of the nineteen-thirties—only to find that I had become enmeshed in intrigue. The picaresque was overwhelmed by chancellors, archbishops and the leaders of the proletariat. In fact I had created a credible state, but it had cost a quarter of the book to do so.

With Ruritania safely in the waste-paper basket, I began to suspect that I might again be doomed to the three-year period between the beginning of one book and the next. I would no more accept such a gap in major production than any businessman, and I stuck as firmly to my chair. Oil wells in Roumania provided some excellent chapters, but the book could not decide what it was about. Oil wells in Arabia would have been a more topical choice, if I did not lack the reporter's trick of making superficial facts appear essential.

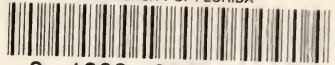
So it went on; and the angel would not be compelled unless I count as hers—for I did not know she had any interest in mere facts—the capricious and impatient suggestion that I should write my life while waiting for another less untidy. I doubted if it could be of interest, and still doubt—for there is no significance in what I have done, none of the famous among those whom I have met and little to commend my thoughts but their expression. Yet the pattern of my life, without any forced selection of incidents, fitted the convention of the picaresque and, though the last page could scarcely present my half-successful self as living happily ever afterwards, I had at least advanced from the professionless young rogue among the pimps of Bucharest.

What I have plainly in common with the hero whom I

would have preferred to create is that I can look back on the past with geniality. It is not wholly due to reticence that I have left out the humiliations and the darkneses of the soul. Memory is an unconscious Christian, forgetting the few trespasses committed by others and the many committed by oneself.

If I have numbered like a witless sundial only the serenest or half-clouded hours, it is perhaps because I was always aware of enjoyment when I had it. Guilty I have been over and over again of seizing it, but never have the laws of life exacted the full price. I have been given great liberty to admire. I will not play the critic and find meaning in an individual when only a general richness of literary texture was intended; yet should construction demand an occasional minor character to taste and to give praise, I too may fulfil a purpose of That which wrote me.

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